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PHILOSOPHICAL  
DISQUISITIONS  
ON THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

ADDRESSED TO  
SOAME JENYNS, Esq.

AND

W. KENRICK, L. L. D.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our  
Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing,  
and that there be no divisions among you; that  
ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind,  
and in the same judgment.

1 COR. chap. i. ver. 10.

L O N D O N :

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MDCC LXXVII.

PHILOSOPHICAL  
DISCUSSIONS

CHRISTIAN RELIGION

ADDRESSED TO



W. KENNEDY, F.R.S.

Now I believe you have been by the way of an  
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PHILOSOPHICAL  
DISQUISITIONS  
ON THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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SO innumerable are the tracks that over-run the plain of religious controversy, so slightly are some of them impressed, so crooked and intricate others, that when the most penetrating enquirer enters upon it in search of a road which leads to a state of future happiness, he is lost and bewildered; and too often, either wanders into the broad and easy road of scepticism and infidelity, or, which is equally erroneous, ascends the lofty hill of enthusiasm:

thusiasm : others there are, which, though they nearly approach and lead to the sought-for clime, keep an unsocial distance. Those marked out by the gentlemen to whom the following sheets are addressed, the authors of "The View of the internal Evidence of the Christian Religion," and "The Observations upon it," appear to be thus situated : their writings tend to the same point ; they both acknowledge the Truth of the Christian Religion, and enforce the necessity of a belief of it ; but though they agree in essentials, yet perversions and misapprehensions have arisen from the various modes of expressing similar sentiments on a subject that may be comprehended, but cannot be perfectly explained, as our conceptions of it vary, according to the different ideas, constitutions, and dispositions

positions of mankind ; few ever exactly coinciding in their religious principles.

Without attempting to imitate the florid, elegant style and manner of the former, or the regular, logical method and divisions of the latter, I shall endeavour to conciliate their disagreements, and to avert the satire of the Observer's criticisms: at the same time, steering a middle course, I shall place the Christian Religion in a view that will render it less incredible to those who are disgusted at its apparent inconsistencies; and, by reconciling Faith with Reason, explain the doctrine of the Gospel upon rational principles : for, notwithstanding the assertions of enthusiasts, without some rational foundation, Faith cannot be meritorious, or worthy of beings capable of reflection and discrimination.

The great Author of the Christian Religion, on many occasions, required of his followers to judge for themselves concerning the doctrines he taught them. When he directs them to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees,” meaning their corrupt and vicious tenets, which inculcate pride and other evil passions, on their misunderstanding his meaning, he reproveth them for their carnal notions; saying, “How is it that you do not understand? \*” When he rebuked the unbelieving Jews for their inattention to the antient prophecies relative to the Messiah, he did not require them to be guided implicitly by his preaching, but to make use of their reason and judgment: he did not insinuate that their intellectual faculties were incapable of discovering the truth, he charged

\* Mark viii. 21.

them.



them with a want of attention and proper inquiry. “ Ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth, but how is it that you cannot discern this time ? Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right ? \* ”. And when he told his Disciples, that after his resurrection many impostors should appear who would severally pretend to be the Messiah, he advised them to examine their pretensions with prudence and circumspection; he says, “ Take heed that no man deceive you ; † ” which certainly implies, that by a proper use of the sense and understanding which nature had supplied them with, they would be able to distinguish between a false religion and that which he now taught them.

\* Luke xii. 56 & 57. † Matthew xxiv. 4.

Before I proceed to make my conciliatory remarks on the "View and Review," as proposed, I shall lay down that Plan of Religion which appears to me most consonant to nature, reason, and revelation, making it as plain and intelligible as the subject will admit of; and from thence deduce my observations. Nor let it be esteemed novel, chimerical, and romantic, as the wisest men of all ages have dropped hints which serve to confirm the suppositions on which it is founded, though, unwilling to contradict established opinions, they have not been as explicit as could be wished. Many of our own countrymen have supported them; but the person I have chiefly followed, is that celebrated physician and worthy man the late Dr. Cheyné, who, with a benevolent concern both for the souls and bodies

dies of mankind, has mingled in his "Essay on Regimen" philosophical disquisitions with recipes for the preservation of health; entertaining, as he says, his readers with amusing conjectures, which, though they may be weakly founded, yet tend to make virtue amiable, to justify the conduct of Providence, and to amend and rejoice the heart without hurting the head. With intentions equally benevolent I shall endeavour to tread in the Doctor's footsteps, and to follow the traces he has marked out; trusting with him, that the mode here made use of, that of reasoning from analogy, will become, when managed by those of more solid judgment, a noble source of divine knowledge and a sublime philosophy. Conclusions drawn by analogy have been but little studied, and timorously applied to, by persons of

a proper spirit and genius, from a dread of the odious imputation of enthusiasm or superstition; but future ages may perhaps get over this terror; for the method has a solid foundation in the nature of things.

The speculative mind which searches from a love of truth and a laudable thirst for religious knowledge, that knowledge which will give him the most perfect ideas his capacity can fashion, of the Great First Cause, of his own present situation, and future prospects, cannot be perfectly satisfied with the opinions of any religious sect, in the state they are generally delivered; as too many of them abound with improbabilities and contradictions: and though we are forbid to pry with presumption into the hidden secrets of Infinite Wisdom, such vain curiosity being destructive of  
Faith,



Faith, yet it is certainly allowable, to endeavour, by every innocent method, to obtain all the information we can relative to our eternal interest. Philosophic conjectures drawn from analogy, if asserted with modesty and diffidence, and not contradictory to the pure and unperverted Doctrines of Christianity, cannot therefore be deserving of censure.

Analogy, which is visible throughout all the works of nature, is a perfect and total similitude of substances and essential qualities, differing only in degrees; as that between an animalcula, an embryo, a child, and a man; or that between a seed and a plant. It is true, analogy can never demonstrate the actual existence and real being of any thing to us, sensation and experience can alone  
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do this : it is only capable of explaining and illustrating the nature, substance, and qualities of things already created ; but then it takes off any contradiction and impossibility from its existence, makes the supposition possible, probable, and rational ; and, clearing away all objections and difficulties, renders it natural and intelligible. Thus from the things which are seen we may form rational and intelligible conclusions relative to the invisible world ; from man we may carry our ideas to spiritual substances, and from them up to the great fountain of light and life. We may err and be mistaken in particular conclusions and deductions from this universal analogy, as well as in geometry or algebra, being fallible and imperfect creatures ; but our errors in the first  
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will sometimes proceed from a different cause than those in the latter; a weak head, want of culture, or precipitation, are generally the cause of mistakes in algebraical calculations; but in analogy, especially that which concerns the moral attributes of the divine nature, the human soul, the holy scriptures, and invisible states, it is often owing to a bad heart, to pride, and self-sufficiency: we are afraid such pure and sublime theorems should be true, as they hint the necessity of a greater purity than we are willing to cultivate at present.

To the generality of mankind the observance of a few plain rules is sufficient; but to those who wish to search deeper, who speculate and philosophize about the regions of invisible and imperceptible beings, and the *arcana imperii divini*,

*divini*, the best and surest method of obtaining so much knowledge as our limited abilities and confined state will admit of, is by having recourse to analogy; of which if we begin with the most simple and least complicated propositions, attentively observing the relations and references of things one to another, their substances, qualities, and probable final causes, we shall acquire a facility in solving difficult problems, and be able to trace, with readiness and accuracy, their degrees and perfection. It is the only natural language by which the Deity can hold communication with his creatures at present, consistent with his dignity, purity, and the preservation of their liberty. He might speak to their wills by his Holy Spirit, and to their understandings by his Word revealed to them



them in the Scriptures, but his sole natural, articulate, indelible, and universal language can be no other than his works; which fill us with wonder and amazement: "The heavens declare the glory of God;" and whether we turn our eyes to those innumerable worlds that roll around us, or to the globe we inhabit, (even in its present condition) we perceive evident marks of beauty, regularity, and order.

By the characters and hieroglyphics impressed on the face of nature, which can be only read and understood through analogy, mortals can discover their relation to each other, and trace their origin to the eternal Source of Being. Beginning with the inanimate world they may from thence proceed to the vegetable world; then advance to the  
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brute creation, and at length ascend to intelligent beings; till by the same discriminating mode, they arrive, through the angelic hierarchies, to the great First Cause. If the contemplative Christian philosopher proceeds in this manner, persevering with patience, humility, and modesty, and begging the direction of the uncreated Wisdom, this divine philosophy might in time, cultivated by different hands, become extensive, and greatly contribute to the good of mankind; as it is from the confined notions we entertain relative to the Supreme Being, whom we are too apt to consider as "Lord of man alone," that we either treat him with a total disregard, or, esteeming him cruel and vindictive, serve him through fear, and endeavour to deceive him by an external purity, whilst

whilst the heart is corrupt. True philosophy is a knowledge of things both divine and human; it is a science which teaches us to know the relation we bear to our great Creator, and through him to all rational creatures: at the same time it instructs us in our duty towards God, our neighbours, and ourselves: nor will any thing, I trust, be found in the following treatise inconsistent with this definition.

As a being of infinite wisdom and goodness must necessarily do every thing for wise ends and purposes, such as will ultimately tend to the happiness of his creatures, we are led to inquire why our Creator has suffered so great a number of natural and moral evils to commit constant depredations on the happiness of mankind, and even to extend their

ravages through every rank and degree of the inferior orders of created beings. If we apply to scholastic learning for an answer, we are lost and bewildered in the fruitless search, and returning dissatisfied with our inquiries are induced either to give up the pursuit, and quiet our doubts by becoming infidels, or to sit down contented with knowing it is so, without drawing any rational conclusions from the observation. That the whole race of mankind should suffer for the mistake or transgression of their first parents (the received opinion of Christians) is derogatory to the goodness of the Deity; or that infants should be exposed to excruciating tortures before they can by any sinful act have deserved punishment, is certainly incompatible with divine justice; but



but if we suppose that the inhabitants of this earth have existed in some prior state, where they have incurred the divine displeasure by some voluntary transgressions, our difficulties will in a great measure vanish; and though it is impossible that we can at present argue with any degree of certainty on a subject, the solution of which for wise purposes is concealed from us, yet many well-grounded conclusions may be drawn from this supposition.

The natural faculties, properties, or attributes of all rational spirits are incontestably these three; perception or understanding, willing or freedom of choice, memory or reflection: from these may all the operations of a human spirit be deduced; and in the degrees of these natural powers do their various

gradations throughout nature consist. From the possession of these attributes, we are philosophically led to suppose, that finite spirits of every order are miniatures, effluxes, emanations, or infinitely small sparkles of the Deity or Supreme Spirit, the Author and First Cause of all things; voluntarily emitted, lighted up, or created by this infinitely Perfect Being, the Source of living, intelligence, action, perfection, and happiness, and endowed by Him with a portion of his radical and essential qualities and attributes: so that all spirits are in their own nature diminutive or infinitely small deities; and, deriving their existence from Him, must partake of His immortality, intelligence, and freedom, or, as it is commonly termed, of His divine nature and image; consequently

quently they cannot be annihilated or deprived of their natural powers.

These faculties and powers, common to all spirits, are not only perceptible, but may be distinguished in every human mind duly exercised and cultivated, by attentively considering its nature and operations ; and from this observation we may conclude by analogy, that the First Great Cause, the Fountain of all perfection, could find nothing without himself, when he first began creation, to be a model or pattern for his intelligent creatures ; he therefore stamped them with his own most glorious image, creating them minute divinities, resembling himself in his radical and essential attributes, and similar to him in perfection and happiness, according to their several gradations and ranks: conse-

frequently all nature, all creation, material, moral, and spiritual, can possibly be nothing else but the supreme, immense, and perfect Being, displayed, pourtrayed, and made sensible and perceptible.

As no perfection or happiness could be added to an infinitely perfect and happy being, he could have no end or view in producing rational intelligences, but to make them happy in their different degrees, and similar to him in his natural and moral attributes; the former (as before observed) are life, intelligence, and activity; the latter justice, goodness, and truth; and in these united consists the perfection and happiness of all intelligent creatures. We find many passages in Scripture to confirm this philosophical disquisition: in Genesis  
God



God is supposed to say before his creation of mankind, "Let us make man after our own image;" again, "In the image of God created he them;" and elsewhere, "Ye are God's images:" besides many other passages both in the Old and New Testament which testify the divine origin and exalted rank of the human spirit.

We may further suppose, that all created beings have bodies, or vehicles of one kind or other, fitted to their order, rank, degree of purity, habitation, and situation; there being no perfectly pure and immaterial spirit, but the Supreme Spirit, the Father and Creator of all others; and that all his creatures, how high and sublime so ever, have proper and peculiar bodies, and organized cases, not only to circumscribe

and limit their powers, their extension and expansion, but to enable them to commerciate and converse with the lower ranks of intelligences, to admire the contrivance of the material worlds they inhabit, and also to execute the orders of the Divine Œconomy and Providence throughout every system of intelligences : for such there must be, as it is absurd to imagine, that those myriads of stars and luminaries which appear in the heavens, are but twinkling tapers formed for the benefit of mankind, uninhabited, and designed only to be ignorantly gazed on.

This celestial body is termed by St. Paul a spiritual body, in opposition to the human frame ; and the glorious appearance or radiation of our Saviour's  
body

body on the Mount, is a further proof that this supposition is not ill-founded. What a spiritual substance is, or of what nature our thinking faculties are, we shall never perfectly know, till we arrive at the world of spirits : all we can at present acquire from the deepest researches is, a knowledge of their sensible qualities, and the effects of them on us. From the uniformity of these effects we may be certain, that spiritual substance in most, if not all, its qualities, is contrary to body or material substance. For example ; we know that matter is absolutely passive, and equally susceptible of motion or rest ; whilst spirit or spiritual substance is self-active ; and, being the immediate productive cause of motion in matter, is consequently endowed with freedom or liberty. Many other

distinguishing qualities may be produced to shew that they are perfectly distinct: matter, however refined and sublimated, is still matter, and has the opposite qualities to spirit, notwithstanding some assert, that matter is only spirit infinitely condensed, and spirit only infinitely refined matter. It is equally difficult to define or describe living, sensation, or actuation of matter: we know that existence or being belongs to matter as well as to spirit; but life, sensation, or perception, and their consequences, can only belong to spirit or mind; nor is it possible for the most learned philosopher, or the expertest mathematician to explain consistently, from the laws of matter and mechanism alone, the life, growth, and fecundity of the lowest plant and vegetable, much less an insect,

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an animal, or a rational and sentient being.

The clearest idea we can frame of created or derivative life (for in the Creator, life is without matter, body, or vehicle, without limits, or a possibility of non-existence) is that of a nice, delicate machine, curiously contrived, and containing a vast variety of organs, set in motion by the First Cause, and continued by an internal self-moving spring; which spring is the spiritual substance we have been treating of.

As we are by this mode of reasoning able to form some conception of the human spirit, we may rationally conclude, that there are innumerable myriads throughout the vast expanse of æther of the same species, though of different ranks; and as we know, that  
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below the human race there is almost an infinite variety of brutal and irrational beings, and under these a like variety of the vegetable kind, all the several species of which, from the highest to the lowest, sink so gradually into each other, that it is impossible to determine where one degree ends, or the next begins, so that it is also highly probable, that above mankind there are orders, ranks, and hierarchies rising gradually and insensibly, without limits and without end, till they verge on perfection. This the dignity, power, and goodness of the First infinitely perfect Being, and the analogy of things give us room to conjecture; and the endless variety of systems (the fixed stars being undoubtedly suns which have their planets revolving around them analogous  
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to ours) with the boundless expansion of space, make this conjecture probable and philosophical.

Further, as angels are only of a little higher and more noble order than the human race, and all created intelligences have vehicles or bodies of a purity suited to their rank in the scale of beings, we may define a pure original unlapsd angel of the lowest degree, and of the next immediate order above the human, to be a spiritual substance actuating a divinely organized body, of a purity and sublimity analagous to his order, and adapted to the perfection of his informing spirit: at the same time rationally concluding, that they increase in perfection as much above the human race, and by the same imperceptible degrees, as the lower order of beings descend to the minutest insect.

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We can form a tolerably clear conception of the nature of man in his present compound state; and he that has a just, though it must be an inadequate, idea of infinite perfection, that is, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, can perceive no possible reason why such a being should create intelligences imperfect in their order, unhappy and perishing, when the same power, wisdom, and goodness could either have totally abstained from creating them at all, or could have made them permanently happy in their order and rank, consistent with their nature and his own. Malice or difficulty cannot be alledged as a reason for this determination, as these could not find existence among the attributes of such a being: but whoever considers the ruinous disordered state of  
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this globe, and the miseries and darkness of the whole system of intelligences that inhabit it, must either conclude, that their Author had not power to make them otherwise, or that they have wilfully forfeited their rank, with his favour and protection, by transgressing the terms and conditions on which they were intitled to it; and thus being left to reap the fruits of their own labour, have sunk into a lapsed disorderly situation.

It is evident from the natural, civil, and sacred history of the whole human race, and from the visible and perceptible state of the globe, and its surrounding atmosphere, that pain, suffering, and misery are as natural to us here as existence. It is utterly unavoidable but in degree; none ever lived but they felt

it in some mode or other. The extreme tenderness and delicacy of our lumbaginous and embryotic state subject us to distempers and sufferings arising from the indiscretions or bodily diseases of our parents; the weakness of infancy and childhood exposes us to innumerable accidents and disorders; strong passions and appetites, depravity of the understanding or disposition, a corrupt and degenerate age, strengthen and confirm our miseries during the season of youth; disappointments, misfortunes, cares, want of the necessaries or conveniences of life, or the abuse of them, luxury, or intemperance, famine or scarcity, epidemical diseases or unforeseen accidents, one or other of these evils, perhaps all together, make up the complexion of manhood; and old age, the

cardinal disease, with all its aches and infirmities of mind and body, finishes the dark scene of human misery.

Infinite power, wisdom, and goodness could not primarily bring any intelligences into being, with rational and \*intelligent spirits actuating divinely organized bodies, but under these two conditions; first, that the external vehicle should be obedient to all the dictates of the free intelligent spirit by which it was actuated, and secondly, that the spirit itself should be submissive to the commands and influences of the eternal and

\* The frequent repetition of synonymous words, and of the monosyllable AND, throughout this system, renders the language stiff and pedantic; but this being absolutely necessary to explain and enforce the sense, which requires the most nervous expressions, I have chosen rather to submit to the imputation of tautology, than to leave the meaning imperfect and inexplicable.

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infinitely perfect spirit, its Author and Creator. This must have been the original state of both the soul and spiritual body of the human race, as they came out of the hands of their Creator, necessarily endowed with innocence, happiness, and perfection; such also must be the constitution and complexion of the unfallen angelic state, and of all the hierarchies of unlapfed spirits. On comparing the inexpressible difference there is between the present state of the human race, and this their original purity, we may venture to deduct a certain pre-existence, as well as a lapse from that perfection.

How and by what steps this lapse was brought on, we cannot ascertain; nor is it of any consequence for us precisely to know: if we may be allowed to conjecture



jecture with humility and modesty about such unrevealed and indefinite truths, we may reasonably conclude, that it was not sudden, but brought on step by step, by many machinations, plots and contrivances of the superior lapsed intelligences on the inferior. Finite beings must form and acquire all their habits by degrees ; so that in all probability it might have been a long time before the Fall was completed : great numbers of every rank and order, and some of the different hierarchies might have been brought into this general rebellion ; and having, through pride, ambition, or an unnatural selfishness, gradually departed from their original love and resignation to their Creator, they were driven from their happy state.

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As God alone is perfectly pure in his nature and substance, he alone can be infallible and impeccable. All created intelligences being free and finite, they must consequently be fallible : though capable of obeying the commands of their Creator, they must also be liable to run into disorder : for they could not be free, unless they had the power of chusing either. The near approach to infallibility of the most perfect spirits, could not be acquired, but by repeated acts of duty, confirmed by various trials and temptations ; in these trials numbers fell : but what the trials of the fallen angels were, and in what manner those who retained their purity stood firm and unshaken, and thereby were eternized, or perhaps rewarded with an increase of glory, for their fidelity, is not

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revealed, nor to be discovered but by analogy or conjecture. All that we know is, that the inhabitants of this ruinous planet are at present lapsed, and in a state of trial and probation; for they cannot possibly be now as perfect as when they came out of the hands of an infinitely wise, good, and powerful Creator.

Whether this globe was primitively the seat of innocent and unlapsed spirits, and by the energy of the lapse became gradually converted into the comparatively ruinous, dark, and dismal state it still retains, and that all the spirits concerned in the rebellion against their Creator, after being encased in their present elementary prisons, exist in rotation for a time on it, cannot be known; but it seems most conformable to the analogy

logy of things, and the common laws of nature, that it gradually changed from its original beauty into its present decayed state, through the natural malignity and deleterious energy of the gradual defection of its primitive inhabitants. Certain it is, that such a place as Paradise, agreeable to the description given of it in Scripture, is no where to be found: the various and uncertain seasons, mountains covered with ice and snow, hurricanes, tempests, volcanos, earthquakes, thunder and lightening, pestilential winds, scorching heats, poisonous insects, and ravenous beasts, counterbalance the conveniencies with which the earth abounds, and may be produced as indisputable proofs of its decayed state: so that Paradise must have been in some other planet or system,



or the rebellious intelligences, with the globe they inhabit, were naturally and physically changed together.

When these intelligences had thus lapsed by affecting independence, when they had departed from that pure love, humble trust, and entire resignation, by which they had usually been actuated, then, agreeable to the eternal laws established in nature, viz. that bodies and spirits attract and unite with similar bodies and spirits from the universal principle of attraction, their spiritual body, losing its original glory, necessarily and mechanically contracted a rust, a grossness, a stupor or inactivity; it became disobedient to the commands of its natural spirit, and gradually degenerated into an earthly gross material prison or dungeon. The spirit was hereby more con-

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tracted,

tracted, restrained, and limited in its original and immutable attributes of living, activity, and intelligence; and, as all spirits are tied down to the nature, order, and purity of their vehicles whilst the union lasts (tho' their natural powers in their essence continue unchangeable) the exertion of the celestial particle was greatly controuled; its moral qualities of justice, goodness, and truth at the same time being greatly abridged, and nearly obliterated.

The Eternal Being, from his infinite benevolence, always intended to recover and restore his lapsed creatures: but, that he might vindicate his sovereignty, repair the indignity offered to his purity, and warn and deter the numerous orders of his yet obedient hierarchies, he suffered them to degenerate, and continue  
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in their present mode of existence as a probationary state, in order that they may by repeated trials regain their native purity, and, returning to order, recover their former happiness. This however he was necessitated by the unalterable laws of his nature to do in a manner consistent with their radical qualities, life, activity, freedom, and intelligence; and, as the acquisition of meekness, poverty of spirit, humility, universal charity, dependence, submission, and resignation was absolutely necessary to answer these purposes, he established labour, patience, temptation, and experience, as the means by which they were to be obtained, and gradually confirmed into permanent habits: without such a mode of proceeding the exertion of his mercy would be incompatible with his justice.

In this lapsed state of human nature the present earthly body was designed to centre and circumscribe the spiritual powers, to curb and restrain the exalted functions of the radical intellectual faculties, in proportion to the defacement and decay of the moral ones ; that both being reduced to a level, they might advance and grow perfect by equal degrees, without clashing or contradiction. Had not this been wisely ordered, their ruin must have been eternal and irrecoverable ; the natural and radical qualities of spiritual intelligences, in their utmost extent, being contradictory to, and destructive of, the acquisition and improvement of the moral ones. Thus, the whole restoration must be brought about by the culture of the moral qualities ; which as they perfect and develop  
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the natural ones, purify and sublime the vehicle. From this it is evident, that to experience, culture, and probation we must apply, both for the extension and improvement of the natural and moral powers of the soul, and for the perfection of the intellectual organs of the body: so that our lapsed state is probitary, experimental, and progressive, from the first period of our lives, through the different gradations we shall yet pass, up to our restored and improveable state.

The whole progress depends in a great measure on ourselves, and may be accelerated or retarded according to our propensity to virtue or vice. The human species are made a little lower only than the angels, with bodies or earthly vehicles supple and pliant to their in-dwelling  
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spiritual intelligences ; and these susceptible of the influences, impulses, and commands of the Father of Spirits, in which their innocence and felicity originally consisted. They are also free, and consequently capable of a progressive procedure from their present state, either forward to perfection and happiness, or retrograde to different stages of accumulating misery, till after many ages, being made sensible of their deviations from their original purity, they strive to recover, and at length gradually attain it, by the renovation of their moral attributes, justice, and truth.

To suppose, that infinite wisdom, power, and love should produce sentient and intelligent beings, without impressing on the essence of their nature an insatiate and unextinguishable ardour to be re-united at last to Him as their supreme

preme felicity, is as absurd as to doubt of his being and existence. No sentient and intelligent being ever was without a longing after happiness; it is a radical principle in their nature; and though the means of obtaining it may be mistaken or unknown, yet it can consist only in this re-union. But as sensibility and intelligence must by their nature and essence be free, and consequently labile, they may degenerate, and by habit acquire a second nature opposite to this implanted bias: so long as this contrary habitual, and foreign tendency lasts, so long must their unhappiness and tortures continue; like the chill and cold in comets whilst in that part of their orbit most distant from the sun.

It is not improbable, but rather consonant to the universal analogy of nature,  
that

that the several planets of our system, and their satellites are receptacles of the several orders and degrees of lapsed spirits. That some of them are darker and less comfortable than others is undoubted; and there is great reason to believe they were not designed for eternal duration. Judging from that we inhabit, we may conclude they are all framed with an equal degree of propriety for the purposes of correcting and amending fallen creatures. We can by no means suppose them, in their present situation, the seats of happiness, or permanent abodes for perfect and glorified intelligences; and both philosophy and revelation seem to confirm the supposition, that our whole system was designed by its Creator to last only so long as is required for the probation, purification, and expiation of that infinite multitude of spirits which  
 felt



fell from their original purity ; whilst at the same time it is progressively, and by general laws, verging towards some grand catastrophe. Astronomers assert, that the present state of our system cannot be of long continuance ; as the solar attraction must necessarily prevail over the projectile force of the celestial bodies, and all the comets, and the planets with their satellites, will at last be absorbed, and swallowed up in the sun.

As the planets of this system appear to be different abodes suited to the progressive probation of lapsed spirits, comets, from the extremes of heat and cold, of light and darkness, occasioned by the excentricity of their orbits, seem to be appropriated for the reception of those who continue impenitent, after having experienced the rigorous and  
gloomy

gloomy climate, and tedious years of the ultimate planet Saturn. The boldest and most hardened of the rebellious angels, not being intitled to the lenity shewn to those who had perhaps been seduced by them, were not permitted to share in this progressive probation, and chance for the recovery of their happiness, but were doomed to a place of greater torment ; from whence they are permitted to issue, without finding thereby any alleviations to their sufferings, to tempt mankind, and to endeavour to gain them for their associates. Their efforts however will probably be in vain ; for every lapsed spirit placed in these different states of probation, will after a time, agreeable to the will of Him to whom a thousand years are but a day, be re-established in their native felicity :  
and

and it is not impossible that the demons themselves (for the goodness of God is inexhaustible) after having performed the work they were employed in, will by some means or other be purified and restored.

When the stupor of the present depraved body had totally extinguished in mankind that desire after a re-union with the Fountain of Goodness, which was originally implanted in their spiritual nature, and all remembrance of their heavenly extraction was lost; when ignorance and idolatry had also spread their empire over the universe, the Almighty Being permitted one of the most exalted of the lapsed intelligences, who approached the nearest to his own perfection and purity, to take upon him the human nature, that he might endeavour,

your, so far as was consistent with their  
 freedom, to revive their moral attributes;  
 and to awaken in them that desire after  
 a renovation of their purity and peace,  
 which is the first step towards its accom-  
 plishment. At the same time he would  
 be enabled to acquire a perfect know-  
 ledge of the depravity annexed to the  
 Fall, the strength of those temptations  
 mortals are continually exposed to, and  
 the pungency of their suffering; that the  
 Supreme Good might make greater al-  
 lowances for their failings, or punish  
 with greater severity their impenitence:  
 for those pure spirits, and even the Al-  
 mighty himself, must be insensible to pain  
 or sin, and consequently incapable of judg-  
 ing with precision (if I may be allowed  
 the bold expression) of the disagreeable  
 sensations that arise from the first, or  
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the almost irresistible incitements of the latter. This voluntary offer of the most perfect of created beings was also accepted by the Highest, as a propitiation for the sins and errors of all the fallen intelligences. As by his sufferings he became perfectly sensible of the unhappiness of mankind, so by submitting to a shameful death, which he had not merited by any transgressions of his own, he made atonement for the sins of the human race, shortened the duration of their banishment, and reconciled the justice of the Great Sovereign of the universe with his mercy.

When God intended to bring creatures into being, he could not chuse but make them (as before observed) after the most perfect model; he therefore stamped his own image on all his works: being by

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this

this means miniatures of the Deity, they must necessarily bear a resemblance to him and to one another. This resemblance or analogy runs through the whole scale of beings; every being besides its peculiar and distinguishing quality, whereby it is determined to this or that particular order, has the pre-eminence of all below it; and is possessed of those qualities that are to be found in any of the inferior orders. These different ranks of beings being distinguished by their respective qualities, their first term of this infinite scale will be simple existence; the addition of another quality will constitute the second term or order; of two qualities the third term, and so on: whence, the number of qualities with which any being is endowed, will determine its place  
in

in this scale, and shew its distance from the first term. Besides this difference in the several orders of beings, there is also a diversity among those of the same order, which proceeds from their possessing some of the common qualities in a more or less degree.

As God can have but one model in all his productions, every system of beings will resemble all other systems, and each will be a copy of the whole creation; the material world will be a transcript of the spiritual, and the laws and œconomy of the one will be analagous to, and correspond with, those of the other. Of this general analogy between spiritual and material systems there are many traces conspicuous to a discerning and contemplative philosopher. An instance presents itself in the similitude

which our solar system, as now disordered, bears to the lapsed intelligences that inhabit it. In the centre of this system is placed the sun, a bright and lively image of the Deity, his material inanimate miniature; the planets and other celestial orbs, revolving about it at their respective distances, and performing their revolutions in different periods of time, represent the several orders of fallen spirits, the different degrees of their lapse, and the duration and continuance of their probatory state. This glorious body the sun infinitely surpasses all the other orbs in magnitude and lustre: they are no more, when compared to it, than points in the circumference of a circle; nor have they any brightness of their own, it being all derived from the sun, and they are more or less



less luminous according to their distance. Thus, but in an infinitely greater degree, does the Great First Cause surpass in perfection and glory the most perfect and glorious of his creatures; and as the planets receive from the sun all their support, so from the great Fountain of Goodness do all created beings derive their existence and happiness. The sun's attraction extends to the remotest part of the system; by it the planets are retained in their orbits, and kept from flying off in the tangent, to which their projectile force gives them a constant tendency: should the sun's attraction cease but for a moment the whole system would fall into disorder, and be irrecoverably ruined. Similar to this attraction is the Love of God; which continually operates upon all

created intelligences, and powerfully solicits them to a nearer approach, and resemblance to himself. Its influence is constant and invariable; and was it possible that it could have the least intermission, the whole creation would be a scene of anarchy and confusion.

As an infinitely rational and perfect being could possibly have no other pattern or model than himself for his works of creation at first, so it is contradictory to reason and analogy, that he should create sentient and intelligent beings to suffer merely through caprice or malevolence; their sufferings must be the consequence of some voluntary transgressions, and the punishment they now undergo must be for some wise and beneficent end: after repeated and progressive purifications, there is no doubt therefore

fore but they will recover their native purity and perfection, and, through the merits and sufferings of Jesus Christ, find their punishment only temporary, which otherwise, from the nature of the offence, and the claims of eternal justice, must have been everlasting.

The spiritual body and immaterial spirit, thus crusted over with clay, may for their progressive purification be an infinite time in developing their natural powers, and in acquiring their moral ones : the thinner and lighter the crust on the etherial vehicle is, the more readily will these purposes be answered, and the necessary sufferings lessened ; the miseries of the present state of our existence will of course be fewer and less intense ; and the total disengagement of the spiritual inhabitant from its prison be more easy and perfect.

From this representation of the state and progress of intelligent beings, it appears, that the natural powers of the soul, as to their essence, are, and will be, in every state through which they may pass, radically and invariably the same, however their exertion might be restrained by the matter with which they are incompassed: consequently all our acquired knowledge is but remembrance; all our culture, study, labour, and attempts to perfect our natural powers terminate only in melting away those crustaceous particles that clog them; by which means the spiritual body becomes more pliant and supple, and more at liberty to extend and exert itself. Our ideas of God and virtue, of moral good and evil, are also, by the same mode of reasoning, innate, not acquired;



quired ; existing in the soul, they are only called forth by study and reflection ; and our knowledge is not implanted, but recovered.

These are the heads of a system of religion, or rather a commentary on Christianity, drawn up with great ingenuity, good sense, and philosophic discrimination by Doctor Cheyné ; for a more enlarged account of which I refer my reader to his Essay on Regimen. As they are there given in a diffuse manner, I have endeavoured to consolidate them, and have selected such as are necessary to my present purpose. That the hypotheses contained in it are not chimerical, or the offspring only of the writer's imagination, the following corroborations from the works of Plato clearly demonstrate.

That

That divine philosopher, treating of the distinction between spirit and matter\*, expresses himself nearly in the same manner as the author of the preceding system has done. He divides nature into two parts; spirit which acts, and matter upon which it acts: he calls the spirit which acts, a being, eternal, infinite, good, and immutable, which hath neither beginning nor end, but is ever the same: he terms matter a mass without form, which is always ready to be produced, and never exists.

The supposition in the foregoing pages, that human beings consist of three distinct parts, the spirit or emanation of the Deity, the glorious celestial vehicle or body with which it was first clothed, and the mortal frame in which

\* In Timæus.

it is now encased, is exactly similar to the opinion of Plato; who describes\* the soul as a substance that participates of the invisible substance; that is, a composition of the first matter and of the universal spirit; which he further explains by saying, that matter is a medium which contains an immortal, immaterial, and consequently indivisible spirit, and also an animal and corporeal spirit.

As St. Paul attributes a distinct glory to each of the heavenly bodies, so Plato says, that God, who designed to form the world as perfect as possible, gave it a soul, which governs, and preserves harmony in it, notwithstanding the constant discord of the elements; he therefore calls the world a God, but a God

\* In his Phileb.

that

that is created and dissoluble. He likewise says, that the Almighty Being created the world according to that eternal pattern which he had conceived in himself; as an able workman has in his head the whole disposition and form of his work before he begins it: after the like manner God in creating the world only executed that eternal idea he had conceived of it; for the world and all that it contains existed intelligibly in God \*, before it existed really in nature; there-

\* The wise men of all ages seem to agree in their opinions relative to the origin of nature: they believed, that all things proceeded from God, and will at length return, and resolve themselves into him. Zoroaster the prince and chief of the Eastern Magi, Hermes the celebrated philosopher of the Egyptians, Orpheus, Linus, Museus, and Pythagoras, among the Grecians, all appear to have held similar tenets, which were founded on still more ancient traditions. But, as if they had been fearful of violating the modesty of truth by exposing her charms



therefore it must have been originally perfect.

charms to vulgar eyes, they drew a veil over her face, and expressed themselves in symbolical and figurative forms of language, intelligible only to the learned and inquisitive. From amidst the intricacies and mystical nonsense of the Jewish Cabala some great truths, or near approaches to truth, may also with care and attention be extracted. The principal doctrines contained in them are these, that all things are emanations of the First Cause—that whatever flows from another must have had a pre-existence, though perhaps under another species or form—that all things will be restored to their primitive state, or retracted into the First Being—that there was always the same quantity of being in the universe, whether it be in a created or uncreated condition; when it was in an uncreated or antemundane state, God was simply all things; but when the world was created, the degree or measure of being was not increased, God only explained and unfolded himself by emanations and effluxes from the highest to the lowest, by which means the different forms and orders of created things are constituted. Mention is therefore often made use of among their mystical terms, of vacuums, of vessels and little repositories for the reception of these emanations, and of the effluent beams and canals through which they run and are propagated, till at last God draws back, and re-assumes these rays, the external world perishes, and all things again become God.

In another place † he says, that God created at once the souls of all mankind who were to live in all ages of the world, and that he distributed them into all the celestial spheres, teaching them the nature of all things, and giving them his eternal laws. He also makes the Daughter of Necessity thus address them before they entered into their present earthly habitations; “ Oh! mortal souls, here is the beginning of a new period of life; you are going to animate bodies that are destined to death.” From this creation of souls before their bodies he draws his opinion of reminiscence, or the power of remembering: for if (he says) the soul existed before the body, it must have had in it all notions; and consequently all that we learn

† In his Tenth Book of Laws.

through

through the course of our life, is only the remembrance of what we had forgotten.

From the union of soul and body, he says, the passions and sensations result. When the soul is mistress she leads a life of temperance and justice; and when she leaves the body, returns to the star to which she was formerly assigned: but when she becomes a slave, and plunges herself into all sorts of corruption, she suffers a punishment tenfold more than all her pollutions and impurities; and, after a thousand years, has a liberty to chuse what kind of life she likes best: if she still chuses to live irregularly, she goes to animate beasts; that is, she becomes from day to day more vile and vicious; which continues, till at last she comes to acknowledge the  
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Empire of Reason ; follows this guide, which is given her ; and, by purging herself from all pollution of the elements, returns to her first state.

From the same source he draws the origin of false opinions, errors, and all the follies of mankind. He says, that when the soul is, as it were, deluged by the torrent of matter, it can no longer distinguish truth ; because objects appear inverted. When she moderates the course of this torrent, so that reason is not surmounted, or obscured by the mists of passion, she then sees all things as they really are ; and, being fortified by study and experience, penetrates their causes, and by this means arrives at true knowledge and perfect health ; at least as much of either as is attainable in this life.

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He maintains \* as a most certain truth, that as there is an infinite number of good angels in the heavens (that is, in the air) so there is also a multitude of evil ones, that are continually seeking to do mischief to mankind. Seeing we are agreed, says he, that the air is filled with good and bad Genii, which are entirely opposite to each other, this occasions an immortal combat, and requires a constant attention on our part: the gods and the good angels are ready to help us, for we are their possession.

Plato's ideas of God, as we find them scattered throughout his works, are exactly consonant to those in the foregoing system. God, he says, is one eternal, immutable, incomprehensible being: who created and disposed all things by

\* In his Tenth Book of Laws.

his Wisdom ; who maintains all things by his Providence ; who is in all places, and no place can contain him. He further describes him as all things, and yet he is none of those things which have received their being from him ; for he is greater than essence itself. He sees all things, knows all things, and penetrates the most secret thoughts ; he fills the capacity of the deeps, and the immensity of the heavens ; whilst all knowledge, good, virtue, light, and life are only in him and are himself. He is at the same time infinitely good, and infinitely just. He loves mankind with a singular affection, and created them only to render them happy : but, as he is holiness and justice itself, he makes none happy but those who resemble him in righteousness and holiness ; and punishes those who have

have corrupted the sacred character he had impressed on them by creating them after his own image\*.

Convinced also of the impossibility of acquiring any knowledge relative to the invisible world, or of tracing those great truths he has advanced, but by analogy (the method pursued in the preceding plan) Plato recommends the cultivation of it as the only effectual way of fathoming the secrets of nature: he acknowledges, that, since we are but men, we cannot hope to gain a perfect knowledge of them; all that the most penetrating can do, he says,

\* Though this definition of the being and attributes of God, and several others herein, may have been omitted, as being acknowledged and indisputable truths, yet as they serve as proofs of the rationability of the foregoing system, on the establishment of which all my arguments and assertions depend, they cannot be esteemed unnecessary or impertinent.

is to find out probabilities, and to argue from them; pure and simple truths being only known to God, who alone can discover them to men.

By comparing the tenets of Plato with the foregoing conjectures, we see that this divine philosopher confirms every one of them, except that of an atonement necessary to be made for the sins of mankind; that important truth was reserved for a future discovery, to be made by the heavenly Messenger, who was himself to become the propitiation; that it might be said with truth, "that life and immortality was brought perfectly to light by Jesus Christ." In every other point, viz. the nature and attributes of God, and of intelligent spirits—the original formation of the human soul—its essential qualities—its pre-existence in  
some



some other sphere—its incrustation in its present mortal body—the limitation of its punishment—and its final restoration to its original happiness; in all these his sentiments coincide with the preceding philosophical disquisitions.

Many other antient philosophers, as well as many modern writers, were further confirmations necessary, or, would the limits of this treatise permit, may be brought to corroborate the supposition, that the fall of man took place in some prior state of existence. Mr. Pope says, in one of his Ethic Epistles,

The soul uneasy and confin'd from *home*,  
Rests and expatiates on a life to come.

This poet could not with any propriety term a place in which a being had never yet resided its *home*; the word never being

made use of but to denote an usual place of residence : had there been a necessity for his pursuing the thought, we probably should have found the opinion of a prior existence to make part of his religious creed ; especially as in another place, by the following lines, he supposes a fall to have happened among some of the heavenly powers :

Aspiring to be gods if angels fell,  
Aspiring to be angels men rebel.

Our immortal Shakespeare, to whom all the intricacies of nature, as well as of the human mind, were explicable and familiar, seems in several places to support this doctrine ; one only, however, will my purpose permit me to quote. In his excellent play of *Measure for Measure* \* he makes Isabella say, when

\* *Act II. Scene the 7th. Fol. 40.*

she intreats Angelo to spare her Brother's life, " Why! all the souls that *were*, were forfeit once." To which Dr. Warburton subjoins a note by way of explanation, wherein he says, " I have changed *were* to *are*, because the expression in the text is false divinity." And on which Mrs. Griffith, in " The Morality of Shakespeare's drama illustrated," makes this further remark\*: " I tremble at venturing to differ from so learned a judge in matters of theology; but are we not taught, that the Redemption had released the Forfeit? We were then brought within the pale, at least, of salvation, which the Orthodoxy says we were not before; and a second forfeit, I should therefore suppose, to be the consequence of our own transgression,

\* Fol. 40.

and not that of our first parents." With all due submission likewise to so great a judge in theological matters, would not the supposition of a pre-existence render that passage much more comprehensible, than the interpretation given it by the ingenious writer of the remark? All souls that have already existed in this state, as well as those which shall inhabit those earthly vehicles yet to be created, are supposed by Christians, agreeable to the common explication of the tenet, to have incurred the guilt of original sin; therefore Shakespeare, who always marked his language so strongly, would certainly have made use of a more explicit mode of expression had this been his meaning: but if we consider it as referring to a pre-existent state, then he justly and emphatically says, "all souls  
that



that *were*, were forfeit once ;” that is, all the souls which were designed by the Great Author of Nature to animate bodies here, *were* forfeit once ; they had forfeited the favour and immediate protection of their pure and perfect Maker, in consequence of some transgressions, and therefore a Redemption became necessary.

Milton, in his *Paradise Lost*, confines the Fall to those lapsed intelligences now termed Demons ; and supposes the consequences of their degradation irrecoverable and everlasting : at the same time he concludes, that the human race were created to supply the deficiency caused by the expulsion of such a numerous host of rebellious angels : and, still following the Mosaical account, he imagines, that this globe was formed for  
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the abode of the new-made man, the sun, moon, and stars being created merely as lights in the firmament of heaven, to divide the day from the night, and to give light upon the earth. That this account is erroneous and unphilosophical in some parts of it, is very conspicuous to every contemplative observer. By the improvements made in astronomy we are enabled to suppose, with a degree of probability which falls but little short of certainty, that our whole system was created at the same time; the regularity that appears throughout every part of it, the proportionate distance of each planet from the centre, and from one another, and the increasing circumference of their orbits, demonstrate, that had either of them at any time been wanting, a chasm must have

have appeared; and that symmetry which runs through all the works of the Great Creator would then have been imperfect. The account of the Lapse as given by Moses (if the books imputed to that great lawgiver were really written by him, which has been disputed) might be allegorical, or a literal, natural, and material meaning, suited to the capacities and dispositions of the people he was set over, relative to a divine and spiritual transaction imperfectly handed down by tradition.

To those who are accustomed to doubt of every proposition that is not made clear and palpable to their senses, the foregoing system will appear an incoherent enthusiastic rhapsody; but by the sincerely pious and well-meaning, such as are desirous of bringing the inexplicable parts  
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of Revelation within the limits of their comprehension, and would wish "to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the Hope that is in them," the intention will I doubt not be accepted, and the errors excused. Unerring evidence, irrefragable demonstration, absolute certainty, would interfere with the moral acquirements of humility, dependence, resignation, faith, and trust; and consequently destroy all merit, gratitude, and love. What faith or merit is there in believing the Problems of Euclid? Demonstration and certainty exclude choice, election, and preference; our immaterial principle would then be as passive as our material, whilst Hope and Faith would be totally suppressed. It is therefore by probability, analogy, final causes, or Revelation alone, that  
 pro-



proper evidence can be drawn to produce Faith, or to give a merit, choice, and preference to the actions of finite, lapsed, and dependent creatures. The whole present scene of Providence, the darkness, obscurity, and apparent deformity in the works of a wise and good Being, with the intricacies of Revelation, seem only contrived and calculated to preserve the natural powers of man, and at the same time to harmonize with the divine attributes, during their necessary purification. Freedom of choice in all intelligent beings to do good or evil, pre-existence abused, and progressive universal restoration well explained, will remove all difficulties and obscurities in Nature, Providence, and Revelation.

The inferences I would draw from the foregoing conclusions are these. As it thus  
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appears, that all sentient and intelligent beings are formed for happiness, and as an instinct implanted in their natures impels them to seek it by every possible means, the first care of mortals should be to search with unremitted ardour after that which is real and substantial. Towards this it is necessary, that they do not confine their attention to the present momentary period of their existence, but take in the whole extent of their being, from the most distant beginning to the most advanced stages of it. It has already been proved, as far as it will admit of proof, that the human spirit came from the hands of its Creator pure, happy, and immortal; an emanation of himself: that it was originally lodged in an inconceivable glorious vehicle or body, but being necessarily left free and

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unfettered as to its will, and exposed to certain trials for the confirmation and establishment of its purity, it fell, and forfeited its original splendour and happiness : from that time the splendid vehicle to which it was inseparably united, gradually lost its beauty, and the moral attributes with which it had been endowed became more and more fettered and suppressed ; till they both found their existence renewed on this planet, and being inclosed in a mortal body, acquired their present confined and wretched condition.

The soul, however, dissatisfied with its situation, as a faint remembrance of its original happiness, will sometimes break through the gloom which envelopes its divine faculties, still retains a longing after it ; but through the present de-

depravity of its nature, blindly wanders in the search, and chafes a phantom instead of the reality. It is to revelation, and to true philosophy which clears away the apparent intricacies of revealed religion and enforces it, that mankind must have recourse for the attainment of that substantial knowledge which will enable them to discover the fallacy, and to distinguish between the delusions of sense and real happiness. Or rather, for instruction how to recover that felicity which was originally annexed to their nature; for it is not to be found in this planet, though we sometimes flatter ourselves we have got possession of it: like an ignis fatuus it is always at a little distance before us, never within our reach. The shortest and readiest way to do this, is to endeavour with the utmost vigour



vigour and the strongest efforts of our spiritual nature to recover the moral powers of the soul, defaced and cancelled by the lapse, which are justice, goodness, and truth; or, in the language of christianity, faith, hope, and charity.

It might be objected to these philosophic disquisitions, that they are vain and unnecessary, as every thing needful to salvation is revealed in the holy scriptures; but all that is disclosed in them of these great truths, of past and future states, is general, indeterminate, and indefinite; greater precision is promised only on our advancement and progress: “He that doth the will of my Father,” says our Saviour, shall know of my doctrine. Our first lesson therefrom is just what is necessary to begin our return; the knowledge of more truths and greater

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precision,

precision, is to be the reward of our progress: the next immediate step, the incumbent duties of the next hour or day, we are not left ignorant of; this is all that is necessary; the rest is wisely put out of our reach till we advance that step, and when we come to a proper disposition of mind for the knowledge of more exalted truths, they will be disclosed to us, and we shall then admire the wisdom of our Heavenly Teacher, for having concealed from us what would have taken off our attention at the time from more important concerns. We may there learn sufficient to animate and encourage us in our probatory state, and if we are ignorant, it is because our minds are not properly disposed to benefit by the acquisition. Notwithstanding this efficacy of the sacred writings  
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on the minds of those who diligently search them, yet if the study of philosophy serves to elucidate the doctrines of Christianity, and by that means they are made more intelligible to those who doubt or disbelieve, or if it tends to store the minds of the sincere professors of it with rational faith and well-founded hope, and hastens their progress in the acquisition of more important truths than are there revealed, it is not only allowable, but worthy of encouragement.

The following elucidations of some of the doctrines of Christianity, which appear discordant to the ideas we would wish to form of the great first Cause, will prove at once the utility of the foregoing conjectures and the truth of them. According to this system, our Almighty

Creator is supposed to have created mankind, or at least the spirits by which they are actuated, perfect, happy, and immortal; that they are neither possessed of perfection, happiness, or immortality at present is but too certain. Whether this great alteration was effected by the frailty of our first parents, who yielding to the suggestions of a subtle fiend, whose arts and guile it was almost impossible for them to withstand, eat of the forbidden tree, and by their disobedience entailed innumerable miseries, with mortality, on their descendents; or whether it was brought about by the gradual defection of myriads of angelic beings, who having rebelled against the Sovereign of the Universe, are now placed on this and the other orbs of our planetary system, as states of probation and expiation,



expiation, and who after a certain time, having recovered their native purity by the chastisements they have received, will be at last restored to their original happiness and glory, I leave to the judgment of my readers. If the former be allowed, and such multitudes are supposed to suffer from the errors of their progenitors (for many labour under a load of natural evils before they are capable of sinning) the declaration \* of our Saviour “that straight is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there be that find it,” is shocking to humanity; and occasions us to look on our Great Creator, not as a just and merciful father, but as a cruel and vindictive tyrant, who wantonly, and to gratify his malevolence, brought crea-

\* Matthew 7th Chap. 11th verse.

tures into being to make them miserable; but if the latter supposition is allowed, if we may conclude that God created mankind to be finally happy, and that after some temporary sufferings, their penitence being awakened by the different stages of punishment through which they pass, will be accepted, and that notwithstanding their transgressions, they will be at length restored to their pristine felicity, the denunciation loses much of its terror: very few comparatively may begin their progress towards this re-union from hence; very few may find the miseries of this state sufficient to awaken in them a sense of their depravity, or to arouse that longing after their former purity which is implanted in every breast; further and more intense punishment may be necessary for these purposes;

poses ; but though they may be termed eternal when compared with their present point of existence, yet there is the greatest probability that they will some time or other end.

The threatenings likewise frequently denounced by the Divine Author of Christianity against the rich and great, with his assertion “ That it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven,” a doctrine to which we give our assent with so much reluctance, is hereby explained, and rendered consonant to the rules of justice. By the supposition that all mankind have erred, and are here under the displeasure of their heavenly Father, sufferings of some kind or other are necessary for their restoration ; and as the rich and

great are more exempted by their situation from the evils of this life than the poor and needy, or, if they meet with afflictions, as all do in some degree, find means by a constant round of pleasure and dissipation to prevent their purifying effects, with truth was the above severe declaration made.

In a mind duly cultivated, the miseries and sufferings of life excite an anxious desire to know if there be any possible means of being freed from them at last; and if there be any rational and probable way to secure, after this mode of existence is at an end, some state of being more tolerable and happy. This is the situation the great source of wisdom and goodness intends, by his wise œconomy, to bring the minds of his fallen creatures into; as in such  
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a disposition they will sooner or later be induced to enquire into the truths of revelation, and to say in the language of holy writ, " Lord, what shall we do to be saved ?" Thus the unavoidable pains and miseries annexed to human nature, may be turned into blessings, and esteemed, as they really are, mercies and fatherly corrections ; for if properly improved they lose their stings, and become righteousness, peace, and joy. But as constant dissipation and an uncontrouled indulgence of the passions, which the opulent and powerful are more particularly enabled by their affluence to pursue, take off the attention from this important concern, and center it only on the present moment, regardless of futurity, the admonitions affixed to pain and troubles lose their efficacy ;  
and

and instead of yielding the fruits just described, they retain only their corrosive qualities. An increase of misery, and a longer duration of it in the next progressive state, will probably accomplish what the possession of those things which are now falsely esteemed the greatest good has here prevented.

The atonement made for sin by the sufferings and death of Christ appears, as it now stands, contradictory to reason and common sense. That an infinitely merciful and good Being should think some excuse necessary for the exertion of his mercy towards his erring creatures, is totally inconsistent with the ideas we are enabled by his works to form of him. The Being that causes his sun to shine on the just and upon the unjust, can need no excitations to receive his.

his repentant children, when they are brought, by the punishment inflicted on them, to a just sense of their situation, and to a due repentance for crimes committed, perhaps, through frailty and irresistible temptations. But if we suppose, agreeable to the system here laid down, that the atonement was made for transgressions of high import, and of an unpardonable nature, committed against conviction by beings in possession of every good, enabled by the perfection of their nature to withstand them, and not in a similar situation to the weak, frail inhabitants of this earth, surrounded by wants, and encompassed by temptations, the tenet is perfectly conformable to reason; and our faith, being founded on probability, will not degenerate into weakness and credulity.

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With regard to the doctrine of the trinity it appears not to be reconcileable, without some explanation, to any system that can be devised : nor indeed is it easy to find out from what part of the history of our Saviour it is to be collected. That an undivided immutable Being, who is entirely distinct from and infinitely superior to the most perfect of his creatures, who fills all space, and knows neither beginning nor end, should admit of a temporary division ; that one part should be immured in a vehicle of clay, whilst the other is exercising its power for the preservation of myriads of worlds, and that he should become an atonement to himself to satisfy his own justice, is a doctrine as inexplicable as a confusion of terms and ideas can make it. To those who have been accustomed to form  
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their ideas of the Supreme Being, as too many well-meaning but narrow-minded Christians do, from the representations made by painters, of a venerable old man, with a long beard, leaning over the edge of heaven, and solely employed in listening to their prayers, accompanied on the one side by a younger man, his son, bearing a large cross, and on the other by an illuminated dove, and who from this union fancy they have a perfect and rational conception of the Trinity, the doctrine may appear intelligible; but to more enlarged minds it must always remain an inexplicable mystery, neither to be explained by the reason of man, or fathomed by analogy. It might possibly be esteemed more meritorious by the generality of Christians humbly to adore,

and to believe the best we can, than to philosophize about it; yet if so capital a part of the Christian Religion can be reduced to any rational conclusion, without lessening our veneration for the adorable Persons who are imagined to compose this mysterious, equally unequal, this distinct but undivided Trinity, an attempt to solve it in some degree, and to render it more consonant to the nature of the Great First Cause, may not displease those who would wish to have some foundation for their Faith.

This can only be done by supposing the Son of Man, as he always terms himself, to have been, before he took upon him the human form for the benefit of mankind, the first of created beings; infinitely pure and perfect when  
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compared with the lower orders of intelligences, but imperfect when put in competition with his Creator. This is certainly no degrading view to behold the Saviour of the World in, or can it lessen the love or veneration of sincere Christians for him; neither will it make the sacrifice of such an exalted being appear unequal to the propitiation required. This conclusion may perhaps reconcile many to the belief of Christ's divinity, who could not be persuaded to believe him co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. It may also, with the assistance of Divine Grace, be the means of bringing Infidels to the knowledge of the true religion, who, because the doctrines of the Trinity and vicarious atonement appear, as usually explained, so very incomprehensible to the utmost  
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exertion of the human mind, refuse their assent to every part of the Christian scheme.

The judgment rebels at yielding an implicit belief to any assertions that are contradictory in themselves, or, not being within the bounds of probability, are totally inconsistent with reason. The confidence we place in the skill of a mathematician might induce us to believe the general certainty of his demonstrations, if such as we see are clear and explicit, though we should not understand the process from whence the proofs arise; but if any of his conclusions appear contradictory, and palpably dissimilar to our judgment, our confidence abates, and we suspect the discussion of all his propositions. Thus it is with religion: if a conspicuous harmony does  
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not run through the whole of its institutes, if it is not in some measure agreeable to our reason, which, tho' limited and confined, when duly cultivated is equal to the attainment of every necessary truth, the belief of it is only a weak credulity, and unworthy an intelligent being.

Faith is undoubtedly one of the chief requisites towards a perfect compliance with the established rules of Christianity; it is required as a test of the sincerity of its professors: but this faith must be rational and consistent; not like the blind implicit assent of ignorant zealots, who take every part of their belief on trust, and search not into the credibility of the doctrines they subscribe to. If the tendency of the Christian Religion appears to us consonant to the ideas we have of the Supreme Being, and calcu-

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lated to promote the real happiness of mankind, if from the internal evidences so conspicuous to every speculative enquirer, especially when elucidated by a supposition of a pre-existent state, it seems worthy of credit, though we cannot comprehend the secret workings of Providence in the promulgation of it, or unravel all its apparent intricacies, yet a belief of the mysterious parts of it under the foregoing restrictions is equally our duty with a conformity to its precepts: faith then becomes meritorious, and completes the Christian character.

The mystery of the Incarnation, which otherwise is incomprehensible, will be rendered credible by admitting the preceding philosophic conclusions. The conception of a virgin is contradictory  
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to the established rules of nature; but there was no other method by which a pure and perfect being could be cloathed with mortality, and escape the contamination of his new vehicle. A son of Adam could not be born without a propensity to sin; from the usual method of generation only lapsed and frail beings can be produced; the power of the Most High therefore (as it is elegantly expressed by the Evangelist) overshadowed a virgin; a daughter of the only people who then worshipped the true God, whose pure and uncorrupted mind and body rendered her a fit receptacle for the heavenly Guest. After this supernatural impregnation the Sublime Spirit received by the natural methods an earthly body, became an inhabitant of the earth, and thereby was

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enabled to execute the commission he had accepted.

By these few instances (to which many others might have been added) of the concordance of faith with reason, and of the rationability of the Christian Religion, the foregoing conclusions being admitted, all the improbabilities and contradictions in it are proved to receive their intricacy from misapprehension, and the want of due attention to the grand primary truths relative to the being and attributes of God, and the relation all his creatures bear to him. Had the author of the "View of its internal Evidences" carried his discussions a little higher, had he traced the necessity of a revelation to its source, he would have found, that it originated in a prior state of existence; the internal evidences of its authenticity  
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and divine origin, produced and supported by him with so much perspicuity and judgment, would have received a considerable reinforcement, and together have carried irrefragable conviction with them; nor would he then have said, "that had Revelation been less incomprehensible, it would certainly have been more incredible." Had the Reviewer \* of this incomparable performance likewise taken a view of the Christian Religion through the medium of a pre-existent state, he would not have begun his

\* As I may frequently make use of the term Reviewer, for the purpose of distinguishing the Author of the "Observations on Mr. Jenyns's View of the internal Evidences of the Christian Religion," from the honourable Writer of it; I beg to be understood, not to denominate Doctor Kenrick from the undertaking he is with so much honour to himself employed in, viz. as Editor of the London Review, but as the Reviewer of the "View;" a distinction which he frequently uses himself in his pamphlet.

Remarks with saying, that “ among the many attempts to recommend and accommodate the profound mysteries of Divine Wisdom to the shallow comprehension of the human understanding, the present is by no means the least promising, or plausible. But the *impossible* necessarily includes the *impracticable*; and all attempts to reconcile objects, that are in their very essence irreconcilable, must ever be ineffectual.” That it is neither impracticable or impossible to do this I trust the foregoing propositions will demonstrate. In their accepted state, I acknowledge that many of the Doctrines of Christianity are so; but without assuming “ the arrogance of modern rationalists, who cavil at every thing in Revelation that is not reconcilable to reason, and deny every thing

thing to be religious that is not rational," I contend that such doctrines as are contradictory to the reason Heaven has blessed mankind with, the chief use of which is to regulate their conduct, and to direct them in the choice of those religious principles which will best enable them to regain their original happy condition, or at least that such as carry an apparent incongruity with them, cannot be proper objects of our Faith. Very many of these are to be found in the Holy Scriptures, from the usual method of explication; which, by the system here humbly proposed for further improvement, may be explained or removed. This granted, I readily allow, that though many parts of Sacred Writ are unintelligible, and too deep to be fathomed by our limited

comprehensions, yet as they are not in themselves contradictory, but highly probable, they become proper exercises for our Faith, which will contribute to help us forward in our progressive return to happiness and perfection.

Any endeavours to explain or amend the forcible and conclusive arguments urged by the sensible Writer of the "View," in favour of the Christian Religion, may appear unnecessary: it is true they carry conviction with them to those whose minds are already disposed to receive the heavenly doctrines, but to make them convincing to those who disbelieve or doubt, and who expect every possible elucidation of the grand points, the explanations arising from the foregoing system seem to be wanting.

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The following answers given by him to some of the objections that are usually made to revealed religion, may not be able to withstand the sophistry of Infidels.

“ In what manner the Union of the Trinity is formed,” says Mr. Jenyns\*, “ or why God accepts these vicarious punishments, or to what purposes they may be subservient, Christianity informs us not, because no information could enable us to comprehend these mysteries, and therefore it does not require that we should know or believe any thing about them.” And further†, “ Many,” says he, “ have objected to the whole scheme of this Revelation, as partial, fluctuating, indeterminate, unjust, and unworthy of an omniscient and omnipotent Author, who cannot be supposed

\* View, Fo. 168.

† Fo. 170.

to have favoured particular persons, countries, and times with his divine communication, while others no less meritorious have been altogether excluded from its benefits; nor to have changed and counteracted his own designs; that is, to have formed mankind able and disposed to render themselves miserable by their own wickedness, and then to have contrived so strange an expedient to restore them to that happiness, which they need never have been permitted to forfeit; and this to be brought about by the unnecessary interposition of a Mediator. To all this I shall only say, that however unaccountable this may appear to us, who see but as small a part of the Christian as of the Universal plan of creation, they are both in regard to all these circumstances exactly

exactly analogous to each other. In all the Dispensations of Providence, with which we are acquainted, benefits are distributed in a similar manner; health and strength, sense and science, wealth and power, are all bestowed on individuals and communities in different degrees and at different times. The whole œconomy of this world consists of evils and remedies; and these for the most part administered by the instrumentality of intermediate agents. God has permitted us to plunge ourselves into poverty, distress, and misery, by our own vices, and has afforded us the advice, instructions, and examples of others, to deter and extricate us from these calamities. He has formed us subject to innumerable diseases, and he has bestowed on us a variety of remedies. He has  
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made us liable to hunger, thirst, and nakedness, and he supplies us with food, drink, and cloathing, usually by the administration of others. He has created poisons, and he has provided antidotes. He has ordained the winter's cold to cure the pestilential heats of the summer; and the summer's sunshine to dry up the inundations of the winter. Why the constitution of Nature is so formed, why all the visible Dispensations of Providence are such, and why such is the Christian Dispensation also, we know not, nor have faculties to comprehend. God might certainly have made the material world a system of perfect beauty and regularity, without evils, and without remedies; and the Christian Dispensation a scheme only of moral virtue productive of happiness, without the



intervention of any atonement or mediation. He might have exempted our bodies from all diseases, and our minds from all depravity, and we should then have stood in no need of medicines to restore us to health, or expedients to reconcile us to his favour. It seems indeed to our ignorance, that this would have been more consistent with justice and reason; but his infinite wisdom has decided in another manner, and formed the systems both of Nature and Christianity on other principles, and these so exactly similar, that we have cause to conclude, that they must proceed from the same source of Divine Power and Wisdom, however inconsistent with our reason they may appear." On this quotation, though written with great judgment, and in the main consistent with truth,

truth, I shall take the liberty to make the following remarks.

In the preceding pages it has been proved from the Nature and Attributes of the Almighty Creator, that he must necessarily allow all his intelligent creatures freedom of will; he could not therefore, consistent with this freedom, render even their happiness and purity immutable and permanent: being thus free as well as finite, many erred and degenerated from their original perfection, and probably would have found their sufferings continued through infinite ages, had not the Father of Mercies, prompted by his immensurable goodness, thought fit to expedite their restoration by means consistent with this moral liberty: the Doctrine of Christ's Atonement is not therefore strange or im-

improbable; and though it cannot be proved to a mathematical certainty, nor the precise conditions ascertained, yet, considered in this point of view, it ceases to be a mystery, and far from one of those intricate articles that does not “require either our attention or belief.”

Even the Doctrine of the Trinity, which has caused so much contention and ill-will among Christians, is by the foregoing system brought within the compass of our comprehension. Not I own if the usual acceptation be retained of three persons co-equal and co-eternal; but if we conclude it to be composed of One Almighty and infinitely perfect Being, the Father of all things, who knows no equal, and compared with whom all other beings are finite and imperfect—of his beloved son Jesus Christ,  
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the first and most perfect of intelligent spirits, the brightest Emanation of the Father, formed before all worlds; who became incarnate to teach mankind the way of life, and by his death to atone for their crimes; and who, being now restored to his pristine glory, is become the Mediator between God and his fallen creatures—and of the Holy Spirit, that divine light, which issuing from the throne of God, to perfect the work the Messiah had begun, continues to direct mankind to the path that leads to happiness; whose celestial influence our Saviour promised whilst on earth to those who should petition for it in his name with sincerity and fervour: for, finding during his abode here that human nature was not equal to the various conflicts it was perpetually engaged in  
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with the powers of darknefs, or to bear up under the load of natural and moral evils “ which flefh is heir to,” procured for mankind from the Great Source of Good this divine affiftance, which can alone fupport them under their difficulties ; and which, if its dictates are not filenced by the impetuofity of their paffions, or by too great attention to the concerns of the world, will reftore them to their former happy and perfect ftate.

These Three may without a breach of propriety be confidered as One God, and adored as fuch by mankind ; as united they conftitute the Fountain from whence flows every good that mortals either enjoy or are taught to expect. But at the fame time the different gradations will plainly appear to every un-  
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unprejudiced and discriminating mind. Jesus Christ has declared unto us, that God is love; and he describes him as our friend and parent. Actuated by the same love and concern for the welfare of mankind, with truth might he say, "I and my Father are One\*." "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father;" that is, We are both employed in the same work, in the promotion of the happiness of frail and dependent creatures; but he does not represent Himself as equal to the Father, his subordination is acknowledged by him in every discourse. He says to his Disciples, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointedun to me†:" In another place, "I can of mine own self

\* Luke xxii. 29.      † John v. 30.

do nothing \*:" and innumerable passages may be brought as further proofs. From the books written by three of the Evangelists nothing can be collected to confirm the supposition, and the texts in St. John on this point are equivocal, and will equally admit of a different interpretation. I wish not to weaken the faith of those zealous followers of Athanasius, who can without hesitation believe the Doctrine of the Trinity as it is usually taught; I have been thus explicit for the benefit of those that are less credulous, and would wish to reduce the articles of their faith, as near as possible, to the standard of reason.

Though, as the Author of the View observes, the whole œconomy of the world consists of evils and remedies; al-

\* John x. 30.

though God, after having permitted us to plunge ourselves into poverty, distress, and misery by our own vices, has afforded us the advice, instructions, and examples of others to deter and extricate us from these calamities, how shall we reconcile to this equitable measure the different fate of very many of his creatures, who are afflicted with grievous and almost insupportable disorders, produced either by the imprudence of their parents or accidental causes before they have attained that age, at which, being able to distinguish between good and evil, sin may be with justice imputed to them, and the punishment they suffer deserved. This is generally supposed to be one of those intricacies in Nature and Providence not to be accounted for, and therefore to be passed over in silence;



silence ; but the supposition of a pre-existent state, where the punishments inflicted in this world have been merited, will readily solve the difficulty : this will annihilate every appearance of injustice in the Deity, and justify, even to our finite understandings, the ways of God to man. This admitted, the solution applied to it in the preceding extract is incompetent ; it is there said, “ that God might certainly have made the material world a system of perfect beauty and regularity, without evils and without remedies, and the Christian Dispensation a scheme only of moral virtue, productive of happiness, without the intervention of any atonement or mediation ; but though it seems to our ignorance, that this would have been more consistent with justice and reason,

yet his infinite wisdom has decided it otherwise; and therefore we ought to conclude, that the regulation proceeds from the same source of divine power and wisdom, however inconsistent with reason they may appear." There is the greatest probability, that the material world was originally a system of perfect beauty and regularity, and that the evils now so prevalent throughout nature, have been generated long since its first formation to tally with the acquired depravity of its inhabitants; therefore, though we may conclude, that the regulation proceeds from the interposition of divine power and wisdom, it is not by this mode of reasoning altogether inconsistent with our conceptions.

The ingenious Author of the "View" would have found the doctrine of a  
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pre-existent state to have greatly assisted him on another occasion, in his Explanation of the Nature and Origin of Evil. He there says\*, “ All evils owe their existence solely to the necessity of their own natures; by which I mean, they could not possibly have been prevented, without the loss of some superior good, or the permission of some greater evil than themselves; or that many evils will unavoidably insinuate themselves, by the natural relations and circumstances of things, into the most perfect system of created beings, even in opposition to the will of an Almighty Creator, by reason they cannot be excluded without working contradictions; which, not being proper objects of power, it is no diminution of Omnipotence.

\* In his Letters on the Origin of Evil.

tence to affirm, that it cannot affect them. That the Almighty should be thus limited and circumscribed by the nature of things, of which he himself is the author, may to some seem not very intelligible: but surely it is not at all difficult to conceive, that in every possible method of ordering, disposing, and framing the universal system of things, such numberless inconveniences might necessarily arise, that all that infinite power and wisdom could do, was to make choice of that method which was attended with the least and fewest; and this not proceeding from any defect of power in the Creator; but from that imperfection which is inherent in all created beings." Would not the Fall of the intelligent spirits, and the subsequent depravity that in consequence of  
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it spread itself throughout this planetary system, have better explained the origin of evil than by limiting the power of the Almighty, and making the imperfections of nature the effect of necessity? According to the foregoing scheme the Great Creator is only necessitated to allow all created intelligences a freedom of will, or the liberty of obeying or disobeying certain rules and restrictions which he had laid down for the regulation of their conduct; this is not in the least inconsistent with any of his attributes, or derogatory to his glory: but, agreeable to the above system, he is forced to act in opposition to his own will, and in creation to make choice of that method which was attended with the least and fewest inconveniences. By this supposition one of his principal attributes

tributes is greatly contracted, and the idea we are taught to form of him as an infinitely wise, good, and powerful Being, equally infinite and unconfined in each, is in a great degree destroyed. No system or suppositions (for on subjects relative to the intellectual world probable suppositions is all the certainty we can arrive at) can be well founded, that are either contradictory in themselves, incompatible with the known attributes of the Deity, or destructive of any of the essential endowments of his creatures. Conclusions therefore that contain the least degree of inconsistency should never be admitted; and arguments deduced from the supposition of a pre-existent state will perhaps by future discussions be found more conclusive than any that have hitherto been made

made use of. The Reviewer of Mr. Jenyns's Letters seems in some measure to support the conclusions I have drawn; for, in his Criticism\* on them, he says, "the Origin of Evil, such as it is, appears to have been subsequent to the creation of all things; and to have been so mysteriously introduced into the system, as to pose the most subtle and sagacious of Sophists to define its nature, or even determine its existence."

But to return from this digression. The Author of the View in another place† observes, that "to some speculative and refined observers it has appeared incredible, that a wise and benevolent Creator should have constituted a world on one plan, and a religion for it on

\* London Review, for September 1776.

† View, fo. 133.

another;

another; that is, that he should have revealed a religion to mankind, which not only contradicts the principal passions and inclinations which he has implanted in their natures, but is incompatible with the whole œconomy of that world which he has created, and in which he has thought proper to place them. This, say they, with regard to the Christian is apparently the case: the love of power, riches, honour, and fame are the great incitements to generous and magnanimous actions; yet by this institution are all these depreciated and discouraged. Government is essential to the nature of man, and cannot be managed without a certain degree of violence, corruption, and imposition; yet are all these strictly forbid. Nations cannot subsist without wars, nor war be carried



carried on without rapine, desolation, and murder; yet are these prohibited under the severest threats. The non-resistance of evil must subject individuals to continual oppressions, and leave nations a defenceless prey to their enemies; yet is this recommended. Perpetual patience under insults and injuries must every day provoke new insults and new injuries; yet is this enjoined. A neglect of all we eat and drink and wear, must put an end to all commerce, manufactures, and industry; yet is this required. In short, were these precepts universally obeyed, the disposition of all human affairs must be entirely changed, and the business of the world, constituted as it now is, could not go on. To all this (he continues) I answer, that such indeed is the Christian

Revelation, though some of its advocates may perhaps be unwilling to own it; and such it is constantly declared to be by him who gave it, as well as by those who published it under his immediate direction."

As it has been concluded in the preceding pages, with as great a degree of probability as the nature of the subject will allow, that God did not create man nor constitute the world in their present imperfect state, but that both have degenerated to what they now are, no Religion could be better calculated to bring mankind to a sense of their fallen situation, to awaken their desires after the perfection and happiness they have forfeited, and to assist them in the recovery of it, than the pure and unadulterated precepts of Christianity, as  
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they fell from the lips of the Heavenly Promulgator, before they were tainted by the passions and prejudices of mortal expositors. The world therefore was not *originally* constructed on one plan and its religion on another: the religion revealed to us must be considered as it affects the different states of man, his past, as well as his present and future; if this is done, though it appears incompatible with the œconomy of this world, and contradicts his present unnatural passions and pursuits, for unnatural they are if we allow that mankind were once pure and perfect, yet, when his whole existence is taken in, Revelation will be found perfectly to suit the general œconomy, and the consistency and goodness of our wise and benevolent Creator will be

be conspicuous to the most speculative and refined observer.

The love of power, riches, and honours, which are severely censured by the Christian Religion, has already been proved to be detrimental to the real interest of mankind, as it perverts the mind from its grand concern, the attainment of faith, humility, resignation, and purity of life. The prohibitions issued by it against strife and contests, wars and bloodshed, which continue to rend every part of the globe, and appear inseparable from the present state of it, are with propriety strenuously enforced; as the rancour and hatred, which must ever attend them, is so destructive of that universal love and good-will with which our spirits, from being nearly allied to their Creator and each other, abound,



abound, that they will intirely prevent the purification necessary to the recovery of that blisful state from which we have fallen. A total neglect of all we eat and drink or wear, must indeed put an end to all commerce, manufactures, and industry, was it required; but this does not appear: man is a being compounded of body and soul, therefore a necessary care of the former is as much required of us as an attention to our immortal concerns. The social duties are so intertwined with our religious ones, that any separation is sure to retard the progress of both; and all that is insisted on by our Divine Instructor in the rules he has given for the regulation of our conduct is, that we make not a provision for the wants or refreshments of the body the subject of our constant disquietude, or

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pay a greater regard to the embellishment of our persons than of our minds: "Seek ye first," says our Saviour, "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you \*:" By thus making the necessities and comforts of life the reward of our obedience, he shews that he considered them as desirable, and wished not to suppress a secondary attention to them. His own conformity to all the innocent customs of the world throughout his whole life, is a proof that he did not mean to make any alteration in the established rules of society, when they did not counteract his grand design, that of amending the hearts and purifying the manners of his hearers.

Government, as the Author of the View observes, is essential to the nature

\* Matthew vi. 33.

of man ; but from his assertion, that it cannot be managed without certain degrees of violence, corruption, and imposition, I must beg leave to dissent. In its present perplexed and entangled state, where the ends to be attained are not always conducive to the real happiness of the people, and the means made use of for the attainment of them dishonest and corrupt, this violence, corruption, and imposition may be thought necessary and allowable ; but lenity, truth, and integrity will ever be found much more probable to establish a well-regulated constitution, than intrigue, corruption, and deceit.

His observation\*, “ that the irreconcilable disagreement between Christianity and the world, announced in num-

\* View, fo. 137.

berless places in the New Testament, and indeed by the whole tenour of those writings, are plain declarations, which, in spite of all the evasions of those good managers, who choose to take a little of this world in their way to heaven, stand fixed and immoveable against all their arguments drawn from public benefit and pretended necessity, and must ever forbid any reconciliation between the pursuits of this world and the Christian institution," is in part only just: that the friendship of the world, when set in competition with the favour of God, is productive of enmity towards him, we too often see verified; but proper sentiments may be entertained of the Supreme Being, and our religious duties performed with zeal and sincerity, notwithstanding we preserve a communication



nication with the world, and enjoy every  
 pleasure that is consistent with inno-  
 cence, or that does not tend to take  
 off our thoughts from securing the more  
 durable pleasures of a happy futurity.  
 It is only a conformity to the vices and  
 follies of the world that is prohibited.  
 An indulgence of every passion that na-  
 ture has implanted in us, to a certain  
 degree, is allowable; the pleasures of  
 love, of friendship, of sociability, and  
 every other grateful enjoyment that  
 serves "to make the bitter draught of  
 life go down," if held subservient to the  
 love of God; and if they interfere not  
 with that perfect resignation expected  
 by him from creatures in a probatory  
 state, carry no stings with them, nor  
 can they excite the displeasure of an in-  
 finitely benevolent Being. But as these

are apt to engage the affections too deeply, and the amusements and relaxations of life tend to debilitate the mind, and produce a total inattention to religious duties, as likewise from the natural instability of every thing in this state we cannot ensure the continuance of any of the enjoyments we pursue with such avidity, for a moment, we ought not to place too great a value on them, or to feel too intensely the deprivation of them.

In this imperfect state, perfection cannot be expected from us; to strive as much as in us lies to acquire the greatest degree of purity man is capable of, is all that can be required: the intention, if this is done, supplies every deficiency. Some of the rules laid down in the Scriptures for the regulation of our conduct,

duct, especially those which are the immediate subject of this discussion, are delivered with such severity as to render a perfect obedience to them impracticable to the most perfect of mortals; as, in drawing a character designed for general imitation the moralist heightens it above the common standard of human excellence, and paints it rather as mankind ought to be, than as he expects they will be; that after the utmost exertions of the human powers we may still find something in the model uncopied.

Doctor Kenrick on this part of the "View" very justly remarks\*, "that Christian morality, in its purity, is not calculated for the practice of man in his present state, but inculcated to inspire a proper disposition preparatory to an-

\* Observations, fo. 131.

other ; and, for the same reason, he thinks the observance of it no farther required than it is practicable." He then further observes, " that the Christian Religion enjoins not impossibilities ; it imposes not hard and impracticable duties ; requiring no more of any man than lieth in him. The Scripture expressly declares, " Its yoke is easy and its burthen light." He might have added, that its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace ; for nothing can afford a man any solid satisfaction, but the practice of those virtues enjoined by Christianity, or any thing support him properly under the evils of life, but faith and confidence in the promises of immortality given therein by its Divine Author to his sincere and humble, tho' frail and imperfect followers. Nothing  
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can satisfy those innate longings after happiness, which every man that is not immersed in vice and folly must frequently feel, but the declarations of our Saviour, that whosoever believed in him, and acted conformable to his precepts, as far as human nature will permit, should inherit everlasting life; or, in the language of the preceding system, find their progressive restoration to perfection and happiness, and their reunion with the source from whence they sprung, greatly accelerated.

So many criticisms have already been published, either in the periodical publications, or in detached pieces, to decry the assertion of Mr. Jenyns, "that valour, patriotism, and friendship are not Christian virtues, as a person who conforms to the rules of the Christian Religion

gion with a primitive strictness can have nothing to do with them," that any further observations on the subject must appear unnecessary: I shall therefore only remark, that was it possible for Christian nations to become, as he emphatically expresses himself, Nations of Christians, valour would then be found to be intirely needless; as all strife and contentions, murders and devastations would then be at an end, and no longer call for an exertion of it: but till that happy æra arrives, courage and valourous atchievements will be esteemed, and the true hero carested and admired. Then also will patriotism be absorbed in a general love of mankind; and the whole human race, as brothers and fellow voyagers to the same celestial shore, will lose all partial distinctions, and forget

get every denomination but that of Christians: but till then, will that affection, which even the frozen Laplander retains for his native country, predominate over that extensive benevolence enjoined in the Scriptures; in spite of his philanthropy he will find his warmest wishes for the good of all his fellow-creatures contracted into a national partiality, and a preference to the interest of those among whom he happens to be born. Friendship likewise would then undoubtedly become a Christian virtue; for, though we now find it difficult to adhere to the letter of the injunction, and, as we are directed, to love all mankind alike, being told that if we love them only who love us, we deserve no thanks, we shall then find only those who love and respect us to bestow our friend-

friendship on, as there will then be a general reciprocation of love and an universal harmony. However, till this pleasing scene is realized, and we find it more than fancied, our benevolence will not be able to resist the force of prepossession, and a single object will sometimes appropriate the most expanded heart. The most we can do at present is, to form connections only with the wise and virtuous, avoiding as much as possible those alliances that arise solely from party, faction, and interest, or from a participation of vices.

Notwithstanding these trivial disagreements, which perhaps proceed on my part from a mistaken partiality to the foregoing system, and from a consequent opinion, that the conclusions drawn from it would have tended to  
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elucidate some of those points which the Author of the "View" supposes not to lie within the reach of the human comprehension, I freely acknowledge that the proofs brought in support of the Divine Origin of the Christian Religion are urged in so forcible and striking a manner, and are so consonant to reason and the design of Christianity, that they carry conviction with them. The whole performance is uncommonly elegant and masterly, and will be read with pleasure whilst it is in the power of purity of language and strength of argument to please, although it may want the aid of logical precision to gain the approbation of the scholiast or professed critick. To the impartial and discerning it will give a favourable opinion of the sense, candour, and goodness of heart  
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of the truly honourable writer, and will intitle him to the thanks of every sincere Christian. I mean not by the remarks I have made on his work to invalidate or discredit it; the truths it contains are already too deeply fixed in the opinion of the judicious, to render any attempt of that kind effectual: if they should be productive of any future improvements in Theology, or be the means of removing any of the objections usually made to the Doctrines of Christianity, my purpose will be fully answered.

The criticisms of Dr. Kenrick appear to be rather professional, than written with a design to injure the cause in which the Author of the "View" is engaged. If we can judge from the contrariety of his observations, he seems ra-

ther displeased at the manner in which the writer discusses his propositions than with the justness of his conclusions; and with-holds the deserved encomiums on the elegance of the style and plausibility of the arguments, because his investigations are not carried on according to the rules of logick, or with the preciseness of a divine. Mr. Jenyns having said\*, "that should his work ever have the honour to be admitted into the company of the Busy or the Idle, he knows they will immediately determine, that it must be the production of some enthusiast or methodist, some beggar or some madman; from all which characters he assures them he is far removed," the Doctor, before he begins his criticism on the argumentative part of the "View" makes

\* View, fo. 189.

the following\* observations on this passage; "that it is of consequence to the reader to know that the Author is not an enthusiast or a madman, we admit; but why we are told he is not a methodist or a beggar we do not readily conceive. Is any doctrine the less true because it is taught by a methodist? Is any argument the less valid because it is urged by a beggar? Or would the same doctrine be more true if maintained by a metropolitan? Or the same argument more valid if urged by a nabob? Our Saviour and his Apostles were men of eminence neither in church nor state. They were neither high priests nor lords of trade; neither men of credit nor men of fortune. Nor do we see any incongruity in a very credible man's

\* Observations, fo. 8.

being



being a methodist, and a very sound reasoner's being as poor as Job." That the most elevated situation cannot give force to arguments which are in themselves weak, or credibility to doctrines that are contradictory and absurd, is true; but if arguments are forcible and doctrines rational and consistent, it certainly adds weight to them if they are delivered by a man of abilities and learning, whose independent fortune has given him leisure to compare, digest, and correct his disquisitions before he publishes them to the world, and whose affluence secures him from that dejection usually attendant on poverty, which too often throws a gloomy founess over the religious documents of the needy author.

In answer to the proofs of Christianity supposed by Mr. Jenyns to arise from prophecies and miracles the Reviewer observes \*, “ The weight or degree of force therefore which our author gives to the evidence of prophecies, must, notwithstanding he styles it not inconsiderable, be little worth consideration. The utmost that he proposes indeed, is, a high probability; and even this depends on our having other reasons to be convinced that Christianity is of divine origin. A foundation itself far short of the necessary proof in some cases; for men may often have reason to believe what is, nevertheless, not actually true. Even the internal evidence this writer attempts to investigate, appears hence to amount to a mere probability; so

\* Observations, fo. 21.

that,

that, by adding this evidence to those of both prophecies and miracles, he is at best but adding one probability to another." What other evidence than high probability is it possible to produce on abstracted and metaphysical subjects? On physical topics only, which lie within the reach of our senses, can we argue with absolute certainty; and therefore conclusions that are drawn from analogy, or even from Revelation, the only means of attaining divine truths, can receive no greater testimony, than such probability as arises from rational deductions in the one, or from the internal evidences proved by concurrent circumstances, and the confidence we see fit to place on the veracity of its author, in the other.

Mr. Jenyns makes the following remark on Faith \*, “ that it cannot be altogether void of moral merit (as some would represent it) because it is in a degree voluntary; for daily experience shews us that men not only pretend to, but actually do believe, and disbelieve, almost any propositions, which best suits their interests, or inclinations, and unfeignedly change their sincere opinions with their situations and circumstances. For we have power over the mind’s eye, as well as over the body’s, to shut it against the strongest rays of truth and religion, whenever they become painful to us, and to open it again to the faint glimmerings of scepticism and infidelity when we “ love darkness rather than light; because our deeds are evil:” and

\* View, fo. 82.

this,



this, I think, sufficiently refutes all objections to the moral nature of Faith, drawn from the supposition of its being quite involuntary, and necessarily dependent on the degree of evidence which is offered to our understandings." This passage is thus ridiculed \* by the Reviewer :  
 " We cannot pretend to call in question the ductility of our Author's believing organs, or the power he has over them to enable him to believe what he pleases. But, we must own, with regard to ourselves, we should be happy to be possessed of such power of credulity; so as to be able to believe every thing to be true which best suits our interests, inclinations, and circumstances; even though we should thence be subject to be sometimes disagreeably undeceived. We

\* Observations, fo. 77.

should get rid of many irksome reflections, and enjoy many an happy hour, at the hazard only of being disturbed from our pleasing reveries.—As it is, we do not however perceive ourselves, especially just at present, a whit more disposed to believe than to doubt the reality of what we wish to be true. Nor do we think the observation holds good, at least so generally, as in the degree here supposed.” The observation Mr. Jenyns here makes, that men believe, and disbelieve, almost any propositions which best suits their interests or inclinations, is a general one, and can by no means be applied to himself; nor does it prove, that his own believing organs are more ductile than is consistent with good sense. He speaks only of the generality of mankind; and the justice of  
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the remark must be allowed by every examiner of the principles and manners of the human race. It is brought as a proof, that Faith is voluntary, and dependent on the degree of evidence produced to support it: a proposition which Dr. Kenrick himself acknowledges in the succeeding page; when he says, "there is some truth however in the rule, with respect to its general application, as Faith or a Facility of Belief is frequently and strongly recommended in the Gospel." Nor has the Doctor any reason to suppose, that the Faith here meant by the Author of the "View," differs from the pious assent and submissive acquiescence of human reason to the incomprehensible doctrines of the Gospel he there describes\*. So that

\* Observations, fo. 77, 78, 79.

futility may be retorted on the Observer, as his ridicule cannot be supported by any passages in the "View." Accustomed to a critical dissection of words and sentiments, the indefatigable critic is not always swayed by reason and judgment, but cuts up an argument or assertion, though conspicuous and indisputable, merely to show his adroitness at criticism. Mr. Jenyns sufficiently explains himself on this head when he says \*, "that Faith, if brought back to the simplicity of its original signification, well deserves the title of Virtue; because it usually arises from the most amiable dispositions, and is always a direct contrast to pride, obstinacy, and self-conceit. If taken in the extensive sense of an assent to the evi-

\* View, fo. 81.

dence



dence of things not seen, it comprehends the existence of a God and a future state, and is therefore not only itself a moral virtue, but the source from whence all others must proceed; for on the belief of these all religion and morality must intirely depend."

The Doctor's criticism on the following passage in the "View" is equally singular. Mr. Jenyns says\*, "But should this pretended revelation be all a fable, from believing it what harm could ensue? would it render princes more tyrannical or subjects more ungovernable? the rich more insolent, or the poor more disorderly? would it make worse parents or children, husbands or wives, masters or servants, friends or neighbours? or would it not make men more

\* View, fo. 107.

virtuous, and consequently more happy in every situation? It could not be criminal; it could not be detrimental. It could not be criminal, because it cannot be a crime to assent to such evidence as has been able to convince the best and wisest of mankind; it cannot be detrimental, because if Christianity is a fable, it is a fable, the belief of which is the only principle which can retain men in a steady and uniform course of virtue, piety, and devotion, or can support them in the hour of distress, of sickness, and of death." This the Doctor calls, after Lord Shaftesbury, a trite, insinuating, beggarly plea, and farther says \*, "There may be in some cases, great virtue in the word IF; but to us it appears very extraordinary, that such a

\* Observations, fo. 99.

supposition should come from a writer who has laboured so hard and adduced so many arguments to prove the impossibility of Christianity's being a fable. Suppose! quotha! Surely, after all, he does not think there is still "left a loop to hang a doubt on," that he is so very anxious to persuade those he may not convince! that he dwells so earnestly on the saving pleas of there being nothing to be lost, and so much to be got by believing in it." However trite, insinuating, or beggarly the plea here made use of to advance the cause of Christianity may be, neither the authority of Lord Shaftesbury, or his copyist, can invalidate the utility of it, nor disprove the benefits here specified as accruing to mankind from the observance of its precepts, notwithstanding they should

should at last find it to be a fable. Nobler and more refined motives may possibly induce such exalted and discerning minds as *theirs* to give their assent to any religious system; but whilst that Longing after Happiness, originally implanted in the human breast, continues to actuate mankind, each will strive by the most probable methods to attain it; and an attention to interest, as far as it respects futurity, must influence every son of Adam in his choice. It is not therefore at all extraordinary, that even after Mr. Jenyns has laboured so hard (as the Doctor sneeringly expresses it) and had adduced so many arguments to prove the impossibility of Christianity's being a fable, that he should also make use of every persuasion as well as argument to promote the benevolent undertaking



dertaking he is engaged in. His views are more extensive than the Observer recollects when he makes the observation; they are not confined to combating the objections which might be made to Revelation by every doubting, inconsistent, conceited critic, by many of which stamp he knew his work would be attacked, but he further designed to render it of universal benefit, by placing it in every point of view that might render it desirable and worthy the attention of his readers.

The inconsistency of the Author of the "Observations," notwithstanding his frequent charges of a similar nature on the Writer of the "View," are conspicuous in many parts of his critique. He tells us\*, "that with the

\* Observations, fo. 207, 208, 209.

most ardent desire of reconciling Revelation to reason, he long and laboriously attached himself to the study of the Scriptures, and the reading the commentators ; that, with the most earnest wish to find the Doctrines of Christianity true, and its Divine Origin morally evident, he attended with the utmost candour to the authorities of ancient historians and the arguments of modern reasoners. And yet, though early instructed to pay the most profound reverence and put the most explicit faith in the orthodox doctrines of Christianity, the more closely he applied the criterion of reason the more clearly did that criterion appear to be inapplicable. The farther advances he made in human science the less compatible he found it with divine knowledge. That he felt by no means  
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the force of argument respecting the divine mission of our Saviour, either from the completion of prophecies or the effect of miracles. It appeared to him, that the credit of Christianity was so little established, and even the name of its Divine Institutor so little known, in its very birth-place and infancy, that the magistrates themselves speak of one Jesus, as an obscure and unheard-of stranger; and of his sacrifice on the cross as a doubtful event." Yet in spite of all these objections, which appear so unanswerable to him; in spite also of the remonstrances of reason, "convinced solely by the subsequent progress of Christianity in opposition to the incredulity of the times, and the inefficacy of the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles, to diffuse a more general and earlier belief,

belief, he yields a cheerful assent to all the Doctrines of Revelation." In confirmation of this he says, "Next to this he conceived the strongest proof that could be brought of the divine origin, and of a supernatural interposition in the establishment of Christianity, is that the enormous wickedness of its later professors, the flagitious, the inhuman methods of propagating it, together with the apparent absurdities contained in its mysterious tenets, have not been able to bring it altogether into discredit, even in the most scientific ages, and with the most rational and humane nations in the world. Here is, indeed, the appearance of something supernatural; the fulfilling of the Divine Founder's promise to the Christian church, that the gates of hell should  
not



not prevail against it. It is to an overruling Providence and the irresistible power of Grace in the completion of this promise, more than to the strongest rational arguments, that Christianity owes its permanence and protection." How contradictory the account here given of the progress and reception the Christian Religion met with in the earliest ages, to that in some other parts of his work! The Author of the "View" having brought the quick and extensive propagation of Christianity as an argument in support of its credibility, and said\*, "It is well known that in the course of a very few years it was spread over all the principal parts of Asia and of Europe, and this by the ministry only of an inconsiderable num-

\* View, fo. 101.

ber of the most inconsiderable persons, and that at the time Paganism was in the highest repute; the Observer thus remarks upon it\*, “ Out of veneration for the subject, we shall not place this argument in that ridiculous light into which it might be thrown. At the same time, having intimated in what a suspicious light we hold historical evidence in general, we shall not enter into any dispute about the matters of fact. We might otherwise controvert the reputable state of Paganism at the commencement of the Christian æra; the immediate dumb-founding of its Oracles by the preaching of the Fishermen, and the consequent establishment of Christianity in the principal parts of Europe and Asia.” He then subjoins in a note,

\* Observations, fo. 94.

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“ At least, if its doctrine obtained a hearing, and for a while a very partial reception, they were soon obscured and obliterated.” Yet it is upon this foundation, upon this supernatural interposition in its establishment, and upon this alone, that the Doctor builds his faith. Wits, he truly says, have short memories, an adage full as applicable here as where it is applied in the “ Observations\*.”

That it is to an over-ruling Providence and the irresistible power of Grace, as the Doctor observes, that we owe such a comprehension of the Christian tenets as alone can make our Faith genuine and lasting, I readily acknowledge; but at the same time I assert, that the following objections which he brings against the consonance of religion

\* Observations, fo. 82.

with reason, and also his account of the sacred mysteries of Christianity, notwithstanding they are placed by him in the most degrading light, instead of being the greatest apparent absurdities, may be obviated, and rendered by the system of pre-existence I have laid down, consistent with human reason, and worthy to be credited by persons of the most penetrating judgment, without having recourse to that hood-winked faith here supposed to be necessary for the reception of the Christian tenets. The Observer further says\*, “Depended its sacred mysteries on the force of reason, what can be more rationally advanced in defence of the incarnation of Jesus, than of the incarnations of Vistnou? Depended they on rational arguments in favour of their

\* Fo. 212.

truth,



truth, what could reasonably be said in favour of a God, the author of life, becoming subject to mortality? To his being born of a woman, though not begot by a man? To his dying the death of a sinner to atone for the sins of the saints? To his descending into Hell, and his ascending again to Heaven, to re-assume, after all, the pristine glory of the Deity? If there be any thing in any religion more revolting to human reason than this, we are unacquainted with the greatest apparent absurdities in the known world." Could the most confirmed Infidel have urged any thing with greater force and plausibility against the sacred tenets of our holy religion than is contained in this passage? After such a representation must we not wonder at the extreme flexibility of the believing

organs of that person, who is able implicitly to believe doctrines so revolting to human reason, without endeavouring to find some medium through which to judge of them, so that they may be reduced a little nearer to the human comprehension?

In vain does the Doctor strive to convince us of his being really a Christian, by saying \*, “ — and yet experimentally convinced how short is the line of the human understanding, how inadequate the strongest powers of sense and genius to penetrate the veil of Nature and of Providence, we can readily submit our reason to Revelation, and give our unfeigned assent, as Christians, to the truth of propositions, which, as men and philosophers, we can neither fully understand

\* Observations, fo. 213.

or clearly conceive." From his discussion of this part of the "View" he himself must acknowledge, there is great reason to doubt it. In many other instances throughout his Observations he has given too much room for Sceptics and Infidels "to mock and jeer at our solemnities." Were we not convinced by his Epistle to Lorenzo, and some other of his writings, that he is not only almost, but altogether, a Christian, we should be apt to draw some very unfavourable conclusions on that head from the following passages: or, if they be not thus uncharitably interpreted, they at least shew us, that the brightest geniusses cannot argue with precision and consistency on these speculative points, thro' the intricacies that attend the Christian system in its present state: the admission

therefore of the foregoing conclusions relative to the pre-existence of the human soul cannot be deemed improper, as they tend to elucidate many apparent contradictions in it, and renders that blind implicit faith, which has been so much the subject of contention, unnecessary.

The Dr. describes \* the arrogance of those who wish to comprehend what they believe. " Hence nothing can be more reprehensible, than the arrogance of our modern rationalists, in cavilling at every thing in Revelation, that is not reconcilable to reason, and in denying every thing to be religious that is not rational. Tenacious of the name of Christians, as they are of the principles of Heathens, they want to new-model the system

\* Observations, fo. 2.



of Christianity, by expunging all those doctrines which they cannot reconcile to their new-fangled scheme of rationality. But, alas! their reasoning faculties are too confined to soar above “this visible diurnal sphere;” so that, after all, they must sit down content with a religion which intitles them to no better an appellation than that of honest Heathens, or give up even their nominal title to Christianity.” This, however true in itself, cannot be applied with justice to the Author of the work he is now criticising, as the following extracts clearly prove. Speaking of the doctrine of the Trinity, of vicarious atonements, &c. Mr. Jenyns says \*, “The truth of these doctrines must rest intirely on the authority of those who taught them; but then we

\* View, fo. 168.

should

should reflect that those were the same persons who taught us a system of religion more sublime, and of ethics more perfect, than any which our faculties were ever able to discover, but which when discovered are exactly consonant to our reason, and that therefore we should not hastily reject those informations which they have vouchsafed to give us, of which our reason is not a competent judge." And in another place\* he observes, "that reason is undoubtedly our surest guide in all matters which lie within the narrow circle of her intelligence: on the subject of Revelation her province is only to examine into its authority, and, when that is once proved, she has no more to do, but acquiesce in its doctrines; and therefore is never

\* View, fo. 175.

so ill employed, as when she pretends to to accommodate them to her own ideas of rectitude and truth." Is this the creed of a modern rationalist, at least such a one as described by the Doctor? Surely the whole tenor of the work is a direct contradiction to it.

The Observer thus proceeds \*. " Let them chuse ; but the time seems to be approaching when they must make their choice. The Christian world is no longer to be deceived by these wolves in sheep's cloathing ; these believers in the name of a Saviour, whose power of salvation they openly deny." Notwithstanding this religious bravado and severe denunciation against those who are not orthodox, the following extracts, urged in support of his critique, may not be esteemed by the impartial reader quite consistent

\* Observations, fo. 3.

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with true faith. When he controverts the definition of faith given by the Writer of the "View," he says†, "He cannot be ignorant that the expression *Son of God* is differently understood by different interpreters; that some think it consistent with his being a mere man, while others think it exalts him to an equality with the Deity. He cannot be ignorant that his atonement by death for the sins of mankind, is controverted and even boldly denied by a considerable number of professed Christians. To what purpose therefore is it, that our Author tells us this proposition is the essential creed of a Christian, if other writers *of equal authority* tell us otherwise?" Are we not left, by this equal stating of the dispute, to doubt on which

\* Observations, fo. 72.



side the Doctor's own opinion preponderates? If the writings of those, who thus deny every essential article of faith, even such as he himself in other passages avows, are, for the purposes of controversy, acknowledged by him to be of equal authority with conclusions drawn from Scripture by a zealous advocate for Christianity, may we not suppose their objections have equal weight with him, and that his creed is yet to be chosen?

It is too often the case, that controversial writers, in combating the propositions of their antagonists, make use of arguments that militate against their own designs. Can any thing be urged in stronger terms against the divine mission, or convey a more depreciating idea of the Saviour of the world, than the words and manner of the following obser-

observation, though it is only given by way of note. Having enumerated among the objections to a rational belief in Christianity, as already quoted, “ that its credit was so little established, and even the name of its divine Institutor so little known, in its very birth-place and infancy, that the magistrates themselves speak of one Jesus as an obscure and unheard-of stranger, and of his sacrifice on the cross as a doubtful event,” he subjoins in a note† this remark : “ It is true this depreciating mode of expression is used by Festus, a new governor just come into office; but it does not appear that king Agrippa himself, whom Paul compliments with being expert in all customs and questions then among the Jews, knew any thing

† Observations, fo. 209.

more of this Jesus than the governor. Paul indeed would fain have persuaded him, that he knew much more of the matter than he did, or at least would seem to do: he could not, however, persuade him to acknowledge himself a Christian, when he was not. For that *seems* to be the true meaning of the passage, as it *seems* the boldness and artfulness of the insinuation caused Agrippa to get up and walk away." Could the most inveterate Infidel have spoken with more disrespect of Jesus and his Apostle? What might be the Writer's intention in making the remark I know not, but it neither *seems* calculated to give us a favourable opinion of the religion he *seems* to be an advocate for, or of his good sense in professing a religion, whose original promulgators appear to him to  
have

have been so obscure, so artful, and so impudent.

I am sorry that such inaccuracies as are here pointed out, should escape the pen of the learned Author of the "Observations," or that any part of his elaborate criticism should bear the constructions, which a love of truth has obliged me to put upon them. I believe him when he says, "that the Writer of the Critique can as truly aver his sincerity, as the Author of the Pamphlet which is the subject of it:" but at the same time I could have wished, as the Observer seems not to intend to controvert the principal design of the Writer of the Pamphlet; and, however different their sentiments may be in some nice and speculative points, in which

\* Observations, fo. 207.



few are ever known to agree, that he equally intends the promotion of genuine, unadulterated, vital Christianity, I wish, that the Critique had still remained unrevised and unenlarged. Had it continued as it first appeared in the London Review, where, in common with other literary works, "the View of the internal Evidence of the Christian Religion" underwent the examination of the Reviewers, to this indiscriminate mode of pointing out its errors, no objection could justly have been made; but professedly to decry a work, which, if we may judge from the rapidity of its sale, and the eagerness with which it was sought after by every rank, met with universal approbation, was inconsistent with the good sense and well-

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known moderation and urbanity of Dr. Kenrick.

The nervous and incontrovertible arguments made use of by the Author of the "View" in support of the Christian Religion, will always be able to withstand the depreciating attacks of the most sophistical and expert caviller, among that numerous herd of critics to which it has given birth. As Christianity itself is founded on a rock, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, so neither shall this ingenious attempt to illustrate the excellences and divine origin of it, be affected by the ridicule or perversions of its opponents: the Infidel or the Enthusiast shall be equally unable to contradict or vilify the propositions it contains; whilst the elegance of the language, the force of the reasoning,

soning, and the perspicuity of the deductions, exclusive of the elevated rank of the author, shall secure it either from refutation or oblivion.

The evidences that arise from a discussion of the Doctrines of Christianity, as they are contained in the four historical accounts written by the Evangelists, especially as they are elucidated by the the Writer of the "View," must convince every well-disposed and unprejudiced person, if he takes his attention off from the busy scenes of life, and becomes possessed of any degree of anxiety about its future existence, that it was designed for the salvation of mankind; that it derives its origin from the great Fountain of Goodness; and that it was propagated by the interposition of divine Power. We are taught by it that this

is a state of probation, in which mankind are prepared for a happier and more durable period of existence; but still there are many inexplicable points in it, which a speculative person would wish to have cleared up, and brought, if possible, within the limits of his comprehension. Some inconsiderate minds hold every departure from the letter of the holy Scriptures to be an offence against the divine Author of the religion they contain: but when the consequences of this deviation, and the discussions that proceed from it, tend to enlighten and explain the intricate parts of Revelation, any additions or alterations, which arise from this motive, are certainly allowable; and I doubt not but I shall stand excused by every



liberal mind, for the liberties of this kind I have taken.

Without the supposition of a pre-existent state (as before explained and insisted on) there is a general intricacy throughout Nature, as well as in some of the Doctrines of Christianity; from which many are induced to disbelieve, not only the conspicuous Truths of Revelation, but that the world is governed by a wise and good Being: with this supposition these intricacies are unfolded, as far as our weak conceptions will admit of. Supposing this mortal frame inhabited by a celestial spark, an emanation of the Deity, pure, perfect, and happy in its essence, though now undergoing a temporary confinement and punishment, Man can no longer be considered as he too often is, the vegetable

of an hour, and then falling into his original nothing: but the evidence of his immortality appears; and we see in him a celestial stranger and sojourner here. If we further consider him as labouring under the displeasure of his Creator, whom he has offended by some means or other, and as being in a state of expiation for sins already committed, the divine mission of our Saviour will no longer be incredible: he took upon him the form of man, and became subject to the infirmities of human nature, that he might know the frailties adherent to it, and proportion his assistance thereto: he became likewise a propitiation for the transgressions of all the fallen spirits, that he might avert the displeasure of his heavenly Father, and accelerate their return to their former happy state.

state. For, though no excitement, exclusive of his own essential goodness, could be supposed wanting, to dispose an infinitely good and merciful Being to pardon his frail and erring creatures, yet some public sacrifice was required to cleanse away the stain of rebellion they had incurred, so that they may re-assume their place and consequence among the heavenly hierarchies, without being considered by them in a degrading light. That so great a price should be expected, and such deviations from the regular course of nature thought needful, by an inconceivably powerful Being, who is accountable to no other being for his actions, to enable him to find an excuse for pardoning the comparatively venial crimes of the insignificant inhabitants of this earth, and

to atone for the contamination entailed upon them by the transgressions of their first parents, is totally inconsistent with the Divine Attributes, and highly derogatory to the Dignity of the Almighty : and yet this must be the consequence of considering the atonement of Christ in its usual confined acceptation : in this enlarged view the most elevated ideas we are able to form of the great First Cause are not in the least lessened, whilst in the other we unnecessarily limit his power, and reduce him to a level with the Jupiter of the Heathens.

If the doctrine of a prior existence be properly cultivated, and made the foundation of future investigations by those who are able to pursue them with accuracy and precision, it will throw many new lights on the present inexplicable  
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parts of nature and religion. The distinction between spirit and matter will be ascertained by it (I mean as far as it is fathomable by our weak capacities) notwithstanding it is exploded by the acute philosophers of this age; who, encouraged by the discoveries they daily make in natural philosophy, fancy they are able to solve every difficulty that arises. From the ductility of matter, and the extreme refinement they find it capable of, they boldly deny the existence of that separate substance, which we term spirit, and which has been supposed by persons, equally wise and learned with themselves, to be essentially different and distinct from matter: though the researches these minute philosophers are engaged in, may quicken the invention, strengthen the imagination,

tion, refine the reasoning faculties, and be of service to society so far as they relate to necessary and luxurious improvements, yet, having no tendency to rectify the will, to sweeten the temper, or to mend the heart, they ought only to be esteemed as secondary studies, and valued as they lead to the attainment of these superior qualifications. I would not be supposed by this remark to wish to discourage the cultivation of the mechanical arts, or of natural philosophy; I only mean to guard the inquisitive against placing too great confidence in the opinion of such teachers, on points that are above the reach of their experiments; although, presuming on their great abilities and penetration, they value themselves on their extensive knowledge, and pretend to an infallibility, or

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at least to a decisive judgment in the article of religion ; an arrogance inconsistent with that humble spirit enjoined by the great Author of Christianity.

In the prosecution of this enquiry, relative to a pre-existent state, great care is to be taken that we depart not from the paths of probability and analogy, and waste our precious moments in mere speculative and unimportant researches. Doctor Burnet, in his treatise "*De Rerum originibus*," says \*, " The first part of wisdom is to cease from folly, and the first step to truth is to take heed of errors : for the avoiding which, in the study of wisdom, it ought always to have with us the force of a law, wholly to rely on no authority but what is divine, and on no rea-

\* Fo. 86.

son but what is clear and distinct. We often fall into errors from too vehement desire of knowing those things, the nature of which will not admit of an examination; that is, which we can never reach by our own strength, nor by any light given us by Nature or imparted by Revelation." This restriction, however, he does not extend to the enquiries here proposed, for he thus explains himself on this point. "Of this kind are the speculations about the angelic world, and its furniture, into how many principal kinds and subaltern ranks the celestial hierarchy are distributed; what their employments are, and in what mansions they dwell. I can easily believe that there are more invisible than visible beings in the universe; and that there are more orders of angels in the heavens than variety



variety of fishes in the sea; but who will declare to us the family of all these, and acquaint us with the agreements, differences, and peculiar talents which are to be found among them? It is true, human wit has always desired a knowledge of these things, though it has never yet attained it. The Heathen divines have philosophized about the invisible world of souls, genii, demons, heroes, minds, deities, and gods: some Christian divines have also imitated these, with reference to the orders of angels; and the Cabalists, in their Jetzirah, or world of angels, range myriads of angels under their leaders Sandalphon and Metatron; but of what value are all these things? Has this seraphic philosophy any thing sincere and solid in it? I know that St. Paul speaks of the  
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angelic world, and has taken notice of many orders and distinctions among them; but this in general only; he does not philosophize about them; he disputes not, nor teaches any thing in particular concerning them; nay, on the contrary, he reproves those as puffed up with vain science, who rashly put themselves forwards to seek into these unknown and unsearchable things. I will own that it is very profitable, sometimes to contemplate in the mind, as in draught, the image of the greater and better world, lest the soul, being accustomed to the trifles of this present life, should contract itself too much, and altogether rest on mean cogitations; but in the mean time we must take care to keep to the truth, and observe moderation, that we may distinguish certain  
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from uncertain things. For it is the part of a wise man, not only to know those things which are to be known, but also to distinguish and discern those things which cannot be known."

Distinguishing therefore those things which can be known from those which are not attainable, let us seek only after useful knowledge. Under this denomination, the conclusions to be drawn from the proposed investigation may certainly be ranged, as they cannot fail of tending to illustrate the truths of Revelation, to enforce the precepts therein contained, and to make its influence more extensive. Rational discussions are not forbidden by any injunction of the divine Author of the Christian Religion; and there are many things which yet lie hid in the Scriptures, from being para-

parabolically and mysteriously expressed, that, like diamonds in the mine, they only want to be cleared from the darkness in which they were enveloped, to be valued and admired. It is true, that the moral rules designed for the general regulation of our conduct, are so plain and expressive, that "he that runs may read:" but there are also many things that would not only please a speculative and studious mind, but if explained so as to be rendered rational to the learned Infidel, to whom they have hitherto been a stumbling block, may be the means of converting many.

The expression of our Saviour, "Before Abraham was I am \*," has usually been construed into a declaration that he was a self-existent being, or the great

\* John viii. 58.



Creator himself; does it not rather prove what has been already supposed in the preceding system, that in common with all created intelligences, of which he was the chief, the divine particle that animated the body which he then possessed, had really existed before the creation of the world? This construction, though it might at first startle the mind prejudiced by education, or unused to impartial enquiry, is neither irrational, nor derogatory to the glory of the Messiah. A greater degree of power, purity, and perfection than we may suppose annexed to the First of created intelligences, to a being possessing a larger portion of the divine essence than any other, and therefore termed with propriety by way of distinction the

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Son of God\*, was not needful to render the sacrifice equal to the required atonement; and a higher elevation could only be conceived necessary by the heated imagination of an Athanasius. Many other difficult passages in the Scriptures may probably find an explanation thro' the same medium.

I am sensible that any apparent innovation in religion will call forth the censures and anathemas of bigots and enthusiasts; I therefore again repeat that I wish the discussions herein contained, no farther attended to, or propagated, than as they serve to promote

\* Much stress is usually said on this expression the "only-begotten Son of God;" yet in other parts of the Scriptures this term of "Son of God" is not thus confined: we read in Job (chap. i. 6.) that "there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them."

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genuine and vital Christianity. The respectability of that sensible and worthy man, whose opinions they originally\* were, and who, after the deepest researches and most serious reflection, found no reason to disclaim them, may possibly shield me in some measure from their calumny; if not, satisfied of my intentions, I await with composure their attacks. If they contribute in the least towards a clearer explanation of the Doctrines of Revealed Religion, than arises from the rational and forcible arguments contained in "The View of its internal Evidences," I shall be happy.

\* I mean only of the general system here given, many particular parts of it having long been propagated by others. Bishop Burnet, speaking of Sir Henry Vane, a person of eminence, who was beheaded soon after the restoration, says, "He leaned to Origen's notion of an universal salvation of all, both of Devils and the Damned, and the Doctrine of Pre-existence."

And I shall greatly rejoice, if at the same time they serve to abate the violence of the learned Writer of the "Observations," against any attempts to bring the Mysteries of Religion to the test of rational investigation.

I now come to a point in which I entirely agree with the latter; I acknowledge that after we have gained the clearest conceptions of the great truths of Revelation, one thing more is needful to enforce the conviction they carry, so as to make them effectual unto salvation; that is, the Grace of God, or the divine influence of the Holy Spirit. The rational conception here contended for, in opposition to a blind implicit faith, may be the readiest means of procuring this divine assistance, by enlightening the mind, and directing it to the  
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only method of obtaining it, that of having recourse to sincere and humble supplications. The Writer of the "View" has justly described the aids necessary for the attainment of this rational comprehension of the important Doctrines of Christianity. He says\*, "That persons wholly engrossed by the pursuits of business or pleasure, ambition or luxury, want all ideas relative to the subject, and therefore cannot be made to comprehend it: to enable them to do this, their minds must be formed for these conceptions by contemplation, retirement, and abstraction from business and dissipation, by ill-health, disappointments, and distresses; and possibly by divine interposition, or by enthusiasm, which is usually mistaken for it."

\* View, fo. 180, 181.

But even after the highest attainments human nature is capable of, we shall be found to be frail, weak, and imperfect creatures: our essential and natural powers are confined and limited by the earthly coverings in which the immortal spirit is contained. Since therefore precision and rectitude are incompatible with our present state, let us endeavour to rebound from every fall, and to be constantly progressive, if only by gentle steps, towards perfection. If we do the best we can, without murmuring that our powers are so contracted, but humbly hoping and believing, that infinite Wisdom and Goodness will accept the intention, and supply every deficiency in his own time and manner, we cannot fail of re-obtaining our primitive happiness. Towards this, however, it is necessary to beg  
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the assistance of Heaven ; for the moral strength of man is inadequate to the temptations that surround him. The necessity of petitioning for divine support, though but by a mental ejaculation, in every straight and difficulty, is most strenuously inculcated by our Saviour : “ Pray without ceasing,” “ Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation,” are precepts that he constantly reiterates to his hearers, and there are scarcely any of his admonitions but what are seasoned with this injunction. The efficacy of prayer is only known to those who have experienced its preventive power ; and I appeal to every child of nature, whether they have ever found unassisted reason sufficient to suppress and regulate the vicious impulses of the heart ; or whether they

have not too often been convinced of the justice of Mr. Pope's observation, that

Reason itself but gives them edge and power,  
As Heav'n's blest beam turns vinegar more sour.

Thus sensible of our frailty, and that we stand in need of divine assistance, let us constantly beg that Heaven would grant us as much knowledge as is requisite for the discharge both of our religious and social duties : if we do this, and if our sentiments and reasonings are intended solely to promote the glory and magnificence of the great First Cause, to promote the happiness of our fellow-creatures, and to discover our own humility and resignation, we may then rest satisfied that God is infinitely good, that all the dispensations of his Providence are invisible, contributing to the real benefit of such whose minds are in this disposition;  
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and that finally, in his good time, all his creatures will be restored to their original felicity. Possessed of this confidence we should pass on through our different progressions with greater chearfulness, and love instead of fear would be the motive of our services. Nor would any thing contribute more to induce mankind to pursue a virtuous conduct, than the consideration of the original dignity of their nature ; it cannot fail of inspiring them with a pride (the only allowable pride) that will prevent, as far as is consistent with humanity, their debasing their native purity, and which must impell them to make the recovery of their former glory their chief concern.

With regard to the general conduct of mankind (for these speculative discussions can affect but few) without searching  
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ing thus curiously for instruction, the moral precepts contained in the Gospel, and their own experience, if properly attended to, will prove sufficient. The latter will convince them, that if they would but observe the golden mean in all their passions, appetites, and desires, and in the gratification of them follow the uncorrupted dictates of nature, neither spurring her beyond her excitements, nor too violently restraining her innocent bias; and if in all their thoughts, words, and actions they would constantly remember the design and end of their being here, they would enjoy a greater share of health than they usually do, have their sensations more delicate, and their pleasures more exquisite; live with less pain, and die without horror or uneasy apprehensions. Were the  
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dictates of nature and reason attended to, but more especially were they aided by religion, the days of mortals, even in their present lapsed state and condition, would pass in innocent pleasures; they would arrive at a good old age, with their senses free, and their rational faculties clear; till at last, their vital powers being exhausted, they would depart in peace, and most assuredly exchange this state for a happier. Let the luxurious and unthinking boast of the joys arising from the immoderate gratification of their appetites, laugh at every serious admonition, and set at defiance the terrors of futurity; when the farce is ended, when their last moments are drawing on, and Reason and Conscience are left at liberty, there is no doubt but that they will prefer a life  
thus

thus led, and an end so calm, to all the pleasures of sensuality, and the delusive opiate of a false security. The following lines extracted from an irregular Ode to Melancholy, lately inserted in one of the periodical publications, are pleasing and expressive: as they confirm the foregoing observation, and may inforce it so as to render this little work of some benefit, I shall conclude it with them.

- “ Although the vulgar and the rude
- “ Spurn the Delights of Solitude ;
- “ And madly over copious bowls
- “ Destroy their Health, and risk their Souls ;
- “ Although they laugh, and sing, and play,
- “ And joyous drive old care away,
- “ Much alas ! yes, much I fear,
- “ All their mirth is not sincere :
- “ Is there nought disturbs their rest ?
- “ Conscience may alarm the breast :
- “ Time will come when Melancholy
- “ May awake them from their Folly.

F I N I S.



## ERRATA.

- Fo. 32, line 14, for *deduct* read *deduce*.
- 70, last line, leave out *Fo. 40*.
- 73, line 10, for *suppose* read *conclude*.
- 113, line 3, read *be* procured.
- 168, line 9, read The Dr. *thus* describes.



